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SEVERN WOODS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Reaper
Folly
The Golden Hawk

SEVERN WOODS

Edith Rickert

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SEVERN WOODS

PROLOGUE. THE FOREST

IN SEVERN WOODS there is no time. Here among the oak-clad, beech-crowned hills lingers that old England that was before the Romans came. In this long valley has been no change for two thousand years and more. Here are only the innumerable ranks of the trees—wave upon wave of forest, from the bare Cotswolds eastward to the dim mountains of Wales, between the swift Wye, with its many little voices, and the slow Severn, winding a calm, broad road to the sea.

In this valley Caradoc and his men were at home when beacon fires spread the news of the Roman. The oaks he saw have perished and their sister beeches, dead before Alfred met the Dane yonder by Westbury and Edington; and their slim saplings had reached great girth when the Norman came. And under these kings came hunting; and the acorns and beech-nuts that dropped from them into the fallow earth grew into ship timber that routed the King of Spain. Yet all so unchanged, so seemingly changeless, that it needs a thousand-year-old, like Yed-of-the-Yat, to remind you of time.

For the trees are the same; the bracken beneath them is the same, and the gorse where the sheep leave wool, nibbling under; the primroses that crowd the banks, the foxgloves that redden the bare patches of the hills, the bluebells that sweep like deep waters through the shadows among the ferns. All life moves softly here in the old ways. Summer and winter there is scarcely a sound; for the birds love sunlight, and the deer are gone.

In the clearings are a few small villages, as old as the Conquest, some of them, or older. And here and there the woodland itself is scarred with black pits, and coal cars are shunted out, loaded with that which builds up the world's wealth.

Even this is as old as the Romans, or older. The jagged wounds they made in the red earth with their mining are not yet mended with green; and the roads that they drove through the forest for their fighting and their chaffering are roads used still. Overlaid in many places, in others vanishing under the sheep-nibbled turf, or dipping into the bed of a stream, but here and there plain enough in their slow curves along the hillsides, with glimpses of square, flat paving, of high kerbs, deep between the hedges of brambles and thorn—they are emblems of the life and labour that end in nothing.

The Roman came and went, and the Saxon, and the Norman kings; but the old dark people remain, the blood of Caradoc. They know little of the painted toys that most of us call life—know little and care less. They are born and grow and die like the trees themselves, and with scarcely more awareness of the cobweb follies outside. Small lives, small enough and dark enough in the great forest: the great forest that is only a pin-prick on the great earth; the great earth that is only a pin-prick among the great suns—suns visible and invisible and unimaginable. . . . How can we understand? How can we come to understand?

Oh, but here and there, in the forest as out in the world, as the bubbles of dark blood spread through the tree of life, comes a thinking, a feeling, a striving, a something pitiably small, yet for the moment all there is—a movement of blood in the flesh and of that which is neither; and the infinitesimal processes take on meaning. There is a promise, a hint of growth. . . .

I am to tell you of Olwen who lives in Severn Woods.

I. SAILWELL AND KINGSLAND

WINTER is shrill in Severn Woods. The ancient oaks make little of the wind, but the high beeches swing with its passing, and the hollies whistle on the hill-tops. But up and down the green lane between deep-cut banks and hedges of beech and bramble, which was once a bit of the Roman Road from Gloucester to Cardiff, there is some shelter; and even in January finches are flitting and chirping.

Where the road comes out by Severn is Sailwell, and at Sailwell there is a walled garden where flowers sun themselves all the year. In January the chrysanthemum walk is still golden with living blooms among the dead, moss pink and alyssum show timid heads here and there; a few marigolds flaunt by the door; the southern wall of the house is starred with yellow jasmine, and in the ruddy mould under the library windows there are blossoming periwinkle and Christmas roses, a handful of dark violets, and enough primroses to fill a cup nicely.

There on a sunny afternoon, when there was no call for the Doctor, he and Olwen walked up and down the paths, planning what to do next in the garden.

For it was a big garden and a care. Not without thought and labour had it been for generations the pride of the town. The chrysanthemum walk, where they paced most often in this season, was perhaps a hundred feet long, and under the shaggy gold and brown blossoms snowdrops and aconites were poking up their heads, and would presently be crowded by the daffodils and tulips. Later would come the irises, with the

great rose bushes swinging and nodding in the background. And this is but one corner of the garden. . . .

And while the two were putting their heads together: Should it be roses or rhododendrons where the honeysuckle had died of old age?

"An ilex," said Olwen.

"Ilex?" said the Doctor. "Do you know what an ilex is?"

"No," said Olwen. "That is why I want it. Something I don't know—something from the world outside."

"Why not a palm?" he asked. "Or a poplar? Or a monkey tree?"

"Why not?" she retorted. "I should like them, every one. I want . . ."

"What's the matter with you?" He was gruff with sudden anxiety.

"Nothing. I've read too many books. I want to live."

"Live? What's that?" He took his pipe from his mouth and stared at her from under bushy, close-drawn brows.

Then—it was like Olwen—she laughed and came at him with the totally unexpected: "Dad! Do you know who you're like? Like the old picture of Geoffrey Chaucer!"

"My God!" said the Doctor. "It was Francis Drake last time you thought about my looks." He put his pipe back. "What are you getting *at?*"

"Nothing. But he was fat and had a beard like yours and twinkly eyes; and he didn't mean what he said most of the time. It's with your pipe in your mouth you're more like Drake."

"Thanks. But there's something on your mind, Sister. Out with it!"

"A girl thinks," she began.

"Some girls," he corrected. "You, I hope. I've brought you up to it. What next?"

"I've been thinking about life . . ."

She got no further. "Liver, my dear! You know what to take. See that you take it."

But this time she was out of hand: "My beloved fat father, you don't know what you're talking about. You forget my age. If I don't begin soon to think what I'm to make of my life I shall be dead before I begin."

"Past twenty, eh?"

"Past twenty-four."

"When Jack comes home from the Rhine it will settle itself."

"No, I'm done with Jack."

He moved his pipe: "Again! What's wrong with him now?"

"Nothing. Everything. Freckles, for instance."

"Freckled he is and freckled he'll stay, like his father before him. But it's no fatal disease. His heart's in the right place, and he's an eye for you—which argues good taste, my child."

Olwen the irrelevant! "Last year," she said, "I saw him once with Tip digging out a mole or a weasel. Their teeth looked just alike. I think that was the beginning of the end."

"Mole or weasel, a good riddance whichever it was."

"It was the look of him," she insisted.

"He's a man; you've got to take men as you find them. And he'd have been Peterhouse, like me, if the War hadn't cut in. You could do worse than Jack. And there's Whitecross, and the land; enough for a dozen kids, if you'd have so many."

"Stuffy!" she said. "Cushions! Cream!"

"Oh, well, you could do pretty well what you liked with him, you know."

"That's it. I'd hate a henpecked husband."

"I don't know," he mused. "It might make a difference being the hen. Has he asked you lately?"

"Just. I posted the answer this morning. And it's the last time I'll trouble to say it."

"And this afternoon you've begun to wonder about life. There you are!" said the Doctor. "I might have known."

"You wouldn't like me married to Jack!" she said with passion.

"Better him than nobody. And I shall be dead some day. Even fat men die now and then. And what will you do with yourself then?"

He put up a hand to guard his pipe against her expected loving arms; but to his surprise she was quiet and still.

"It has to be thought of," she said. "But it's too far away now to seem real. And I *might* be first. But if not? There's the question. What am I to do? I wish you had let me go to the Front when I had the chance."

"And who was it I saw yesterday," he jeered, "tying up Gwen's cut finger, with a face as white as a sheet?"

"It was a bad cut," she defended herself—"to the bone."

"There were worse at the Front," he said drily. "I saw enough of it in our own hospital while they had the lads here. You'd not have liked the mess. You're no born nurse. Admit it. And you did well enough in other ways—well enough." He seemed to be remembering.

"But if not nursing, what?" she insisted.

"You'd not like to be a schoolmistress, like Susan Willey?"

"Jack before that."

"You see. In some ways you know too much; you've a lot of stray information of no use to anybody, least of all a schoolmistress; and, as you say . . ." He pondered, pipe in hand.

"If I'd only a great talent—"

"—you'd have a hard life," he capped her neatly. "Thank God you've a hand for a garden and nothing more. And that you got from me."

"There's a lot of things one could study," she meditated aloud, pulling him up the steps to the terrace, from which they could look for miles up and down Severn Valley, with the broad stream winding in and out. "I mean practical things, such as—what do they call it?—domestic science."

"Can't you keep house as well as Gwen?" he demanded.

"Yes, but—"

"No 'but.' You've got all the tools a woman needs for shaping her life, and more. I've seen to that. Now you've only to make it from day to day. You're not living yesterday, nor yet tomorrow. You're living this minute, here on the terrace with me, watching that phalanx of rooks wheel over Severn water; they'll be over us in a minute—so!—like the shadow of a great wing—gone. That was living, my dear—that moment. It's gone, but there'll be more than you know what to do with if you once find out how to use them. . . . All the same I'm sorry you're done with Jack—if you are. It's the passing on of life that's the woman's job; and I'd die the happier if I could see my own grand-children."

"Not minding who their father was?" she asked, with a sparkle in her grey eyes.

"It doesn't matter much," he came back. "Almost any father will do."

"I'll remember that when Jack writes again," she said, and shivered. "I'm cold. Let's go in."

"And so it's to be the monkey tree, is it? Or a mango? Or a bread-fruit tree? Or a—?" he asked.

She was irritated: "Oh, no, rhododendrons and myrtle and laurel, laurel and myrtle and rhododendrons, for ever and ever and ever. . . ." She ran away from him and upstairs to her own room.

"A difficult child," he said to his pipe, as he continued to walk up and down between the withering chrysanthemums. "Her mother . . ." But he did not confide to his pipe his thoughts about her mother.

"Roving blood, that's it," went his thinking, "sailors' blood; and me at the end of the line: only a poor ship's doctor without a son. Bad weather ahead for her. . . . If she'd my taste

for science she might pick up the practice here, such as it is, when I drop it; but no use, no use."

He stopped by the door to empty his pipe, and looked, as he had looked thousands of times before, at the square stone set into the brickwork, carved with the lines of a ship in full sail, and a captain in puffed sleeves and trunk hose on the high prow.

"Some woman named the place," he was thinking, "when her man put off to the Indies—some woman like Olwen."

And then came the news.

Gwen was full of it as she set the tea tray on the library table. At her first words the Doctor and Olwen forgot the book they were reading together.

"Kingsland?" said he. "That old reprobate? Oh, it would be the son. Well, a rotten race—a rotten race! Come back to bide —eh? It's a grand rat-ridden hole the old house is. He'll do no good here."

"He'll perhaps bring us news from the world," said Olwen.

"And what do you want with that? You read the papers, don't ye? You let the world be. We're well enough here in the Forest."

"But sometimes I watch the sailboats on Severn," she said wistfully, "and I wonder . . ."

"Then wonder about the swift-footed Achilles we were reading about. He's food for thought."

"He'll keep," she said, and because the tea would not, busied herself with the tray. "He's dead. I'm not."

"No," he agreed, content with his scone. "Ye're alive enough. And when the time comes for husband and babies . . ."

"Is that all—there is to it?"

"What? Life? Well—that—amounts—to a good deal—in the end." His drawl made the words sink in.

But she said: "I'm going for a ride. Sometimes I think I'll ride on and on—never come back. . . ."

"You'll come back," he said comfortably, lighting his pipe. "I'm here."

Clattering down the cobbled street in an old-fashioned green habit, with her dark hair ruffling in the wind, so fast that market people stepped back and gaped after; straining her pony up the long, steep hill, tearing along the grassy woodland, under the high beeches, under the great arms of old Yed-of-the-Yat, down the ravine and up the hill again to Kingsland.

The gaunt house, hollow-windowed and many-chimneyed, gave her to pause. It was no time of day to go farther.

A moment she hung there, remembering the news. One of the Kingslands (a rotten race!) had come back to live in this rat-ridden house—was that what they said? Come back out of the world to this . . . ?

Chimneys—nine—ten—against a blazing sky; a landmark far over the hills. And underneath, the scrub and tangle that had once been garden. . . .

There was the old house *Kingsland*. It had nothing to do with her. She was for Sailwell.

II. THE EXCHANGE OF A FEW WORDS

BY THE clear stream at Yareley she pulled up and dismounted to let her horse drink and crop the sweet grass, while she paused in the flickering February sunshine to draw in the Forest with every breath. She began to pick her way up the hillside, singing in an undertone an old song her father loved:

"Sweet Mistress Halliday
Walking on a holiday,
Tirra la, tirra lay,
Tirra lirra all the way. . . ."

and just then encountered Anthony Kingsland coming down.

"This is the Roman road," he announced, as one who knew.

"Surely," she answered, with eyebrows uplifted at his abruptness.

Then he came to himself and apologized, adding: "My father used to tell me about it, and about the iron mines the Romans worked in the Forest. I think he was homesick for the place. And I knew this must be it: only Romans could have made such a road. It—it all somehow caught my imagination."

"A rotten race," flashed through her mind; but aloud she said, as one meeting a friend after a long absence, "You are Anthony Kingsland."

As he bowed, cap in hand, she caught something of his quality: the high Roman features, the colour that went and

came in his cheek, the thinning light brown hair, the lines—too many lines—on brow and along the nose, on cheek and chin. "He will grow old young," she thought. "I wonder why?"

"But how did you know?" he was asking.

"It's easy to see you're from abroad. Any one would know you're not one of us."

"It's the clothes," he protested. "I'm Forest stock, as you must know."

"Maybe so," she answered. "But you've been about the world."

There was something in her tone that stirred him to ask: "And you blame me for that?"

"On the contrary, I envy you."

For a moment their eyes crossed; then both looked away: it was the first crossing of swords.

"I'm not to be envied," he said shortly. "And I've come back, as you see."

"Then it's I should be bidding you welcome," she answered. "And so I do. And I'm Olwen Bream of Sailwell."

"Olwen Bream of Sailwell," he repeated slowly, looking away from her.

"Yes. Are you the wiser now?"—a gleam of laughter in her grey eyes.

"There's a Dr. Bream in the town . . ."

"My father. And are you comfortable up at the Manor?"

"I've furnished two rooms, but the others are still shut. Mrs. Prickett cooks and cleans."

"Oh, but it's a ghostly house!" she exclaimed.

"I've seen no ghosts," he said drily. "Perhaps I'm not a ghostly person. It answers very well, so far."

"If there's anything we could do—to make you welcome, I mean"—she spoke with a certain flutter—"we'd be very glad . . ."

"What could you do, I wonder?" he said, as if to himself.

"We could invite you to Sailwell," she said, with a pretty dignity. "I'm sure my father'd be very pleased to have some one to talk to . . ."

(And all the while through her mind ran the words "A rotten race! A rotten race!")

"And you—?"

"I'd be glad to hear something about the world you've travelled in."

"You've not been to London?"

She held up three slim fingers: "Long ago."

"And what was it like?"

"Pantomimes, sugared cakes for tea, rain and rain, cabs, and —oh, yes, Madame Tussaud."

"So it is," he agreed. "So it is still. You're not missing much, with all this yours." He waved his hand.

"This—being trees?" she wanted to know.

"Partly," he said. "And emptiness—space, you know; room to throw out the nets of your soul and catch strange fish."

She looked at him, openly wondering.

"If we were to sit down a while, here by the Roman road, and get acquainted, you might not find me so strange," he suggested.

"It's very wet," she objected; but he was off with his big coat and bundling it up: "Better than Sir Walter's; it's waterproof."

"You'll catch cold."

"Not if I had a corner . . ."

"I shall be late for tea." But she sat down and made room for him. "What are you going to tell me about?"

"Do the gossips say why I came back to the Forest?" he asked.

"There's talk, of course. Some say you'll turn Prickett out and do the farming yourself."

"I couldn't do that. There have been Pricketts farming my land for six generations or more. And I know nothing of farming."

"Well, then," she said, provisionally.

"I've half a mind to tell you," he said. "I think I should like you to know. But I shouldn't care to have it talked about."

"I wouldn't want you to tell me any of your secrets," she said, almost in alarm.

"No secret. It's only that I'd like you to know."

"Why?"

He hesitated: "Should you take it for a good reason that I've not met quite the like of you anywhere I've been?"

"You've not?" she considered. "Not abroad in the world?"

"No. Not abroad in the world."

"How, then?" she was asking in good faith.

"Did no one ever tell you?" he asked, with a flash of a smile. "None of the young men with whom you go to dances?"

"No, not to speak of." She suddenly remembered Jack Winter, still in service along the Rhine.

"Didn't he—young 'not-to-speak-of'—tell you you were like a changeling from Elfland?"

"He never—I never—he used to flatter me, of course."

"Impossible!" He hurriedly covered up the word with, "I'll tell you sometime—perhaps. Not today. Today I want to tell you why I came back to the Forest."

"If you like," she said quaintly. "I suppose you must be lonely up there and wanting some one to talk to."

"I'm never lonely," he said, meeting her eyes again—a second crossing of swords; "and as for talking, it depends upon the some one. But I'm here because the War has broken me, body and soul: no nerves, no money, no brains. And I used to earn my living by my brains."

She looked the question she did not ask.

"Writing books, of sorts—trifling, useless books. The War

has knocked 'em all out of me. What's the good? I'll get my bread and cider from the land, and shake my fist at the world, the flesh, and the devil beyond Severn." He ended with a laugh. "If I ever write again, I shall say something."

"I must be getting home to my tea," she said, jumping to her feet. "My father never begins without me. Some day you'll be coming to tell us of your travels?"

"Some day," he said, stooping for his coat.

At the top of the hill she turned and watched him walking slowly away; he did not once look over his shoulder.

And after that the long days merged into a week, and he did not come; week after week, but he did not come. At last, on a windy night in March, Gwen showed him into the library, dripping with rain. But it seemed he had come as a patient; and he went away without more than the exchange of a few words with her.

III. POOR WOMEN

IN MARCH in the Forest spring pokes and perks at the heels of winter. The buds on the high oaks and beeches are still black against the sky; but under the tangles of bramble and in the shelter of washed-about bracken small green things are beginning to climb. There must be primroses somewhere about. . . .

Since there was medicine to go up for Prickett, Olwen said she would carry it by the short way through the Forest.

She'd best go by the turnpike, said her father, if she was wanting a walk; but he could send the stuff. The old road was a slough.

But no, she was wilful: she would go as she would. And with her rubber boots she'd do well enough, and save a mile.

So she splashed up and down the gullies, with sometimes Roman pavement for stepping-stones, or a bit of kerb to walk along, and sometimes sheer puddles, till she came to the pond below the cottages, then up the turfy hill and through the still wood. She had seen it all so often that she saw nothing of it now; but when three grey and brown heavy-headed, shaggy ponies stumbled into the grassy road she was following she had an eye to them:

"Dad and Mam and Baby, new stock for the pits they'll be—those Pirkis was bringing over from Wales."

Suddenly she was sorry for them—the life job of dragging trucks through long galleries of coal mines; never coming up to the light of day; never again nosing for sweet young grass

among the bracken; never sniffing the Forest breeze. . . . She cut short her mooning: "Oh, well, we've got to have coal. And it's their job to help get it. And what do they know about it, anyway?"

She was impatient with herself because it was an old feeling, an old puzzle, and an old answer that told nothing.

She was suddenly encompassed by a litter of young pigs and the sow, pink but crossed with the black of an older race, all snoofing and guggling for acorns. How they worked, eating! Not one lifted its head or turned an eye; their flabby throats swished among the stubble. And all to make coarse bacon; bacon to be eaten by men never washed clean of coal; coal to keep burning the fires of civilization. . . .

It didn't do to think too much; Jack would never think too much. Oh—Jack!

She went lightly along the winding forest track, now taking the broader way where cart wheels and hoofs had cut the turf, now turning into a narrow, twisting path where the gorse, thickly yellow with its own butterflies, caught at her short skirt as she passed. She went lightly along the hillside and up over the crest and down through the slough in a stillness unbroken but by her own soft padding. Where were the March winds that day?

And at last she came out from among the tall trees to the road that led to the riven beech by Prickett's.

She was much at home by Mrs. Prickett's kitchen fire, and was persuaded to stay for tea; for it was a Saturday and there were pikelets. To be sure, she would have had pikelets at home; but she would not have sat to toast them herself, with her lap full of the softest black cat in the countryside.

And there was Mrs. Prickett herself, to whom a talk like this meant a week's living.

Olwen watched her as she hopped about the kitchen—she couldn't walk straight for her bad leg. What had life done

for her that she could be such a dear? Look at her now, like a robin—just: plump, front and back, robin-cheeked and robin-eyed, with smooth tight brown hair, and a voice with just the cheer-cheer-cheer quality of the bird's.

"I have never thought of that before," said Olwen; and was pleased, and smiled a little at the thought. But, after all, what had life brought Mrs. Prickett? An ailing husband, two married daughters, and a son who had not come back from the War. Well, she was not to be turned away from the farm where she had lived since her marriage, the farm her husband's people had tilled since the time of Queen Anne—not yet, at least. Was that what she was chirping about as she set out the tea-things?

". . . 'e says to Prickett, 'e says to 'im: 'Ye'll be safe, my man, in my lifetime.' 'But after that?' says my 'usband—you know, Miss, 'ow 'e always look on the black side; 'tis 'is poor stummick. 'After that,' says Prickett, 'your son, maybe. . . .' 'Son?' says 'e. 'I've got no son, nor will 'ave—never! I'm the lawst o' the old line, and good riddance!' 'E do talk funny for a Kingsland. 'Ye may change your mind,' says my 'usband, 'ye're young yet.' And then 'e said such a thing, Miss—ye wouldn't 'ardly believe it. 'E said: 'Not likely.' And 'e said, 'Marriage,' says 'e, 'wore invented by the devil.' Them's 'is very words; Prickett 'e told me. It's no way for a gentleman to talk, is it now, Miss?"

"If it's what he thinks, yes," said Olwen.

"But you'd never be thinkin' such a thing yourself now, would you? Whatever would the men do without the women, I ask you! My 'usband, 'e wore fair foundered, and 'e says to 'im, 'e says: 'Ye'd better not tell that to the Missus,' 'e says. . . . And where would 'e be—Prickett, I mean—if 'e 'adn't a wife? I awsk you that."

"Nowhere," said Olwen. "Oh, yes, in the workhouse."

"There, now! But the Kingslands must 'ave got into funny

ways of thinkin' while they was livin' abroad in London and other parts of the world."

"Well, you're sure of the farm, at least, for the rest of your lives," said Olwen.

"Sure of it? And what do we make of it, hirin' men and all? If my boy—"

She set the kettle on the hob, and her brown eyes grew sightless, filled with tears.

"There's time yet," said Olwen. "They do come back yet—from hospital, from prison in Germany. It's a long way . . ."

"Four month and more since Armistice Day—four month; and two month before that we 'eard 'e wore missin'. 'E'll never come back, never. . . ."

Olwen tumbled the great cat from her lap and went with comforting arms:

"He might, you never know. Don't give up." Was it right to keep her hope alive? Was it right?

But Mrs. Prickett did not give up. She wiped her eyes on her apron: "There, dearie, I'll just be makin' the tea now. It's the waitin' that takes the 'eart out of the body, it do. 'E'll maybe come back: 'e'll try, w'erever 'e is. 'E always wore a good boy, my Evan. But Armistice Day, I'll never forget that if I live to be a 'undred. . . ."

"Tell me," said Olwen, who had heard it a dozen times before; but who knew it must be told again before relief would come.

"Washin', I wore, that marnin'. Not that it wore washin' day; but I says to my 'usband, I says: 'I cawn't stand it no longer. I'm goin' down cellar to wash.' So I rubbed and rubbed, with the sweat and the tears streamin' down so I couldn't 'ardly see. And the bells began—Lydney bells and all over country. I never 'eard no such bells before. I near went beyond myself. Then my 'usband come in and 'e says: 'It's for peace,' says 'e, 'peace.' 'Don't talk to me of peace,' I says

to 'im. 'Wot's peace to me?' And I went on washin'. Oh, they bells, they bells! They drove me near mad! 'Wot's the good of cryin' like that?' says my 'usband; and 'e come and put 'is two 'ands—like thot—over my h'ears, so's I shouldn't 'ear no more. And then, Miss, you know, I went away. Thought I wore dead, my 'usband did. I don't know wot 'e did; I didn't know nothin'. When I come back I wore layin' on the kitchen sofa—'e'd carried me up, 'e 'ad, and 'e says: 'I'll go fetch Doctor.' 'That ye will not,' I says to 'im; 'I'll just go back to my washin' . . ."

" 'Ye'll go down to the Post Office instead,' says 'e. 'There might be such a thing as a letter,' 'e says to me.

" 'No,' I says to 'im, 'ye may go for the letter. There won't be no letter. I'll go back to my washin'."

"So he went to the Post Office. But there woren't no letter; and there's been none from that day to this—four month. . . ."

"I know," said Olwen. But there was nothing more to say. Oh, the lives of poor women in this world!

Presently they had tea together; and Prickett came in with a sigh, and had his tea apart on the sofa; and there was talk about the weather and the stock, but more about the stranger who had come back.

" 'E's been too long away," said Prickett. " 'E's not one of us, and 'is ways isn't ours. 'E'll never be at 'ome in the Forest. Out in 'is garden 'e is now; but 'e'll never make nothing of it—not 'im. If I 'ad my 'ealth; but wot with the War and all—"

That brought silence among them.

"I must be going," said Olwen.

Oh, the lives of poor women!

IV. AND WHAT?

ALL the way down the green lane she did not lift her eyes to the gate above the mounting steps until it creaked and grated on its one hinge. Then she found the owner of Kingsland looking down upon her with a spade in his hand. He was wearing the breeches and gaiters of a farmer, and his striped shirt was collarless and open at the neck.

"I want your help," he called down.

"For what?" she asked, drawing her thin black brows together.

"This mess up here. Come and see."

Doubtfully she mounted the steps and went into the enclosure while he held the gate; but the havoc he was making brought outcry: "Mercy! You're grubbing up lavender!"

"Which is that? And what is it? And why shouldn't I?" he asked. "That grey stuff? I've known about lavender all my life, and heard them call it on London streets, but I've never looked at it before."

"Smell," she said, plucking a spray.

"Very nice. But what of it? Do I have to keep it for that?"

"Not you perhaps, but"—with her rare dimpling into mischief—"your wife may want it some day for her linen closet. Best set back what you can and dig up weeds."

"My wife," he said deliberately, "will have no use for lavender," and for the third time their eyes crossed swords. "But if you'll tell me which are weeds, I'll get rid of them. That's why I called you up."

"How do you know I can?" she teased a little.

"I've seen your garden," he admitted.

"But if you don't know one plant from another, why get rid of the weeds?" she said. "Let the poor things live."

"I've had to clear a way to get into my own door," he said. "And now I'm trying to tidy up these paths a little, so I can walk up and down and meditate on my sins—and other men's," he answered.

"Then by all means I'll help you." She told him to cut this and dig up that, until he was tired and dusk was upon them.

Then he bade her wait till he could get his coat and see her safe home.

She laughed. "Through the Forest? Where I know my way blindfold? What should hurt me—a mole or a rabbit? There's not so much as a deer nowadays. You'd be the one to get lost, coming back, and have to sleep all night maybe under the bracken, and catch your death there."

"There are worse ways of catching one's death," he said, with a change of voice to grimness. Then: "But I should be going for my own pleasure, and I'll come back by the turnpike. . . . Have you ever been in there?" He flung a hand out toward the house. "No? Come and see."

And in fact she was a-tiptoe with curiosity.

Up the shallow, wide stone steps, through the porch, past the huge studded oak door into the hall, with its eight-foot fireplace, where a log was smouldering into embers. All the furnishings were close about the hearth: a shabby leather armchair and couch, a table littered with papers, newspapers, and books; against the nearest wall a large bookcase filled; on the floor an enormous shaggy skin.

"Bear," said Kingsland. "Couldn't let him go when I sold up. Shot him myself in the Ural."

Ural? Where in the world was that? One must find out. He had shot a bear in the Ural; and perhaps tigers in India

and elephants in Africa. Did one shoot elephants in Africa? Oh, but he must have ranged the world!

Behind this small settlement of furniture were two tall screens, fairly making a small room within the great bare space.

"I sleep in the room beyond," he said, jerking his head toward some steps and a door to the left. "But that's not for a woman's critical eye. I'll get my coat."

"The extraordinary thing," said Olwen, when he returned, "is that I feel as if I can say anything to you; and you living abroad in the world all your life."

"Well, suppose you do," he said, taking her arm at the head of the steps. "Say 'anything' to me, then, anything you like."

"The thing that's most in my mind is how I'd like to get away myself," she said, and was startled at his abrupt, "What for?"

"What's the good of wasting one's life away here in the Forest?"

"I've been wasting mine pretty well out in the world; so there you are," he caught her up. "What is it you want?"

"As if I knew! If I knew I do believe my father would let me have it. He says I think too much, for a girl."

"It's a bad disease; I've got it myself." He was helping her along the rough lane as if she did not know where every stone lay. "But a girl's more likely to be cured than a man."

She would know how, but he seemed reluctant to say. At last it came out: "Marriage is the cure-all, of course. It swings the centre of being into the children; so the more children, the better."

"Isn't that as it should be?" she asked.

"How should I know, being a man and unmarried? But there's a good deal in life besides all that."

"Tell me—" Desdemona was never more eager.

"We cut across here?" he asked, his hand on a gate.

As the gate shut behind them they were alone in the brown dusk of the trees in which oak could not be distinguished from beech. They followed the windings of the Roman road through a deep gully between tree-covered hills.

"Take my arm," said Kingsland. "You might stumble on a stone or slip in a rut."

But she would not. "Me stumble! Me slip!" she laughed.

"Well, I might." She yielded then.

So they walked on in the dimness, not too steadily on the rough road, and in a silence neither knew how to break. It was Kingsland who stopped. "Listen," he said.

There was no sound. Not a twig stirred, not a frond of bracken rustled.

"It is the primeval silence," he said. "So it was here before the Romans came and troubled it with the noise of their quarrying and stone-laying and with the screams of their tortured slaves. They have come and gone, and the silence has returned."

Olwen shivered, clinging to him a little. On a distant farm a dog barked.

"There is the outside world," he said. "We shall be there in a moment. And while I talk you are cold."

They reached the last gate. Then there were but a few hundred feet of high-road, and they were under the walls of Sailwell.

"You'll come in?" asked Olwen.

"Not tonight. I've to find my way back."

"Not through the wood?"

"Why not? There's nothing there but the silence."

"I know; but you'll take the wrong turn and go on and on . . ."

"Well, why not? I shall come out somewhere."

"I should be anxious," she said, and tried to catch the word back.

"What, you about me? I am honoured. Good night."

"Oh, I wish. . . ." She ran a few steps; but he was gone in the darkness.

"What has happened to me?" The thought ran like a white fire through her veins as she stood at the home gate, reluctant to go in. "I must stop." But she did not know what to stop.

From the dark hall she could see her father intent upon something spread out on the table, a green shade over his eyes—the daily chess problem in *The Times,* of course.

She went in without speaking, and waited, hugging her knees on her low stool by the fire, until he was ready to speak. At his "Well?" she gave an account of herself.

"Hum," said he. "And after all this, what do ye make of the young man?"

"I make nothing of him," she said, "nothing at all. I've seen no one like him."

"London ways," said the Doctor. "Plenty like him in London. He'd better have stayed there."

"Why?" she wanted to know.

"Never mind that," he muttered. "He'll do no good to the Forest." She thought he added under his breath, "A rotten race!"

No more was said. They played chess, and she was beaten, as almost always. Supper came in: bread and cheese and cider.

"And now what shall we read?" he said with glee. It was the crown of the day for him. There was nothing he loved more than the sonority of his own voice in fine passages.

When he was tired—she did not know what he had read—she bade him good night and went upstairs. But not to bed: she had it in mind to do something first.

In her blue-and-white chintz room the fire was laid for lighting. She touched a match to it, and brought from her desk a bundle of letters. From a silver frame on the mantel she took the photograph of a lieutenant, not so bad-looking

with the freckles touched out and the lips firmly closed over the teeth. With these in her lap she sat down and waited until the coals were all ablaze. Then she laid them all together in the flames and watched them burn to charred fragments, which she scattered with the poker. So much for that. Who was the general who burned all his bridges behind him? Did he have also to make all the roads before him?

"Whatever comes," she was thinking, "whatever comes, I will not sell my soul to get me a home and children. Not that, at least. And I can always go out of the Forest and . . ."

And what?

V. THE CHURCH CLOCK TOLLED TWO

THERE was little sleep for Olwen those short summer nights. Whether she tossed from side to side, or held herself quiet with rigid will, there was for her no escape from hearing the church bells strike the hours.

Whether she closed her eyes or stared into the moving shadows of her room, or sat at the window with the heavy roses crowding all about her, she could not lose herself in sleep or even rest.

Sometimes she slipped into her clothes and walked up and down the garden between the tall phloxes and lupins; sometimes she sat for hours on the garden doorstep or in the woodbine-covered summer-house on the terrace, drooping with weariness and savage with rebellion against the new wild life in her blood that would not let her rest.

For call it love or call it witchcraft, she had scarcely a waking moment when her thoughts were free of Anthony Kingsland, and it was the image of him haunting her mind that would not let her sleep.

And she had seen him so rarely. Now and then he had come to dinner. Now and then they had met on the road, walking or riding. There had been talk of this or that trifle—gossip or gardens or thunder weather—no more. So little as this? Was it enough to leave her without way of escape?

And there was no one to whom her passion might be told. Her father might laugh or he might swear, but he would not understand; his mind was daylit always. Her mother—would

her mother—so long dead—have understood? Now there was only thick-fingered Gwen, who stumbled through the day's work, and washed the supper dishes with the kitchen door ajar to hear the whistle of her lover from the Goodluck Pits, and went out into the night with him and stayed too late, and was sometimes caught sighing over a pack of cards spread on her bed, because of the promises they made that were like to remain promises—not Gwen.

No, she must master this thing herself, said Olwen, and tell no one. For one way, there was work. Never before that summer had she been so housewifely, never had she made so much to-do in the garden, and never had set by such stores from the garden. From the time of ripe gooseberries and currants until the first blackberries hung from the brambles she was busy with the brass preserving pan. The high storeroom shelves were crowded with pots of jam and jellies, with bottles of cowslip and dandelion wines, with stone jars of green pickles, with glass jars of brandied white-hearts, and damson cheese. Nor such things only, but there were rose-leaves dried and spiced for the window seats, and lavender for the linen; there were nasturtium seeds and coriander gathered and put away, for the Doctor to find and chew upon, solving his chess problems; and the shelves of the tool-house were filling with seeds for next year. And so she went on, from one thing to another—never so busy a woman.

On the rare days of rain she would have by her a great basket of mending, and darn useless things that should have been thrown away.

"You're never with a book these days," said the Doctor.

"Reading's for winter," she excused herself.

"But you're over-working yourself," he said. "What for?"

"I'm not," she answered. "A body must do something or the days are long."

"But you never had such a thought before. And you're black under the eyes," he insisted. "Are ye ill?"

"Why should I be ill?" she said angrily. "There's nothing to make me ill."

And he knew that was true. But he wondered, and was troubled in mind.

When he questioned her again, she said it was the sultry heat.

"And that's true," he admitted. "It's making me thin." He tried to think there was nothing but that; for he could not think what else there might be.

Yes, there was another thing. Girls were girls; and she was a girl made to be married, like her mother—like her mother; and if ever that young scamp came home from service on the Rhine . . . But no one could tell when that would be. Meanwhile . . . But there was nothing to be done.

She kept too much to herself, that was another thing; would not go out any more with the other girls, or even when she was invited or—scarcely—to church on a Sunday morning. Even with himself she was scant of her company. If he was for a pipe among the sweet peas or a sunset on the terrace, and called her to come out, it was rarely she would have the time. Well, well, he could make nothing of her; he considered whether a dose of physic, this or that, might . . .

And sometimes while he was pondering alone in his study, not so busy with his chess problem as he looked to be, upstairs she was hiding in her pillow bitter tears—tears of shame and of anger that she had been trapped against her will into wasting her thoughts on a man who would have none of her.

As to that she was very clear in her mind. Her summing up of him was not without shrewdness; he was one to whom the world gave what he wanted, and who gave little or nothing in return. He would not ask or seek; but things came his way, and he took them or scorned to take them. Love must

have come his way many times; he must have had his fill of it long ago; he was not so young as she by a dozen years. What would he want with a girl, not beautiful or travelled or clever or rich—he who had been everywhere and who had seen all there was to be seen? Then, if that was true, one must keep away and forget—keep busy and forget. Any girl with self-respect would do that. One must forget the look that sent swords through one's body, the ache to touch the hair of his bent head as he stooped to pick up this or that which she had dropped in the nervousness of encounter, the longing to touch his cap, the rake he had held in his hands—anything, anything that was his. It was a sickness, all this, and a shame; and it must be worked away . . .

But in her sultry room all that August she heard the slow toll of the bells, hour after hour; and it seemed to her at times as if invisible hands were dragging her out of bed. Sometimes she would actually dress and creep down the stairs to the garden, or open the street door and look up and down the empty street. If there happened an echo of belated footsteps round the corner she would shut the great door softly and run with wildly beating heart to her bed.

One night she did not. It was a still night, muffled with clouds; but no storm was near. Before morning there might be thunder and all the parched garden drenched and saved. But now the church clock had struck eleven and the town was asleep in a dry and muffling blackness.

Standing in the half-open door, she listened both ways; and then she did what she had never done before—took a step downward toward the street, half shrank, leaned back and drew the big door softly shut, and ran into the night. It was dragging her, this thing, dragging, and she must go the way of it.

She ran as one who knew whither, ran down the smooth-paved street to the Roman road, and along the Roman road,

between the high banks and hedges, with the dust beating about her and a sharp kerb here and there almost forcing a cry for the pain to her thin-slippered feet. Yet she did not fall or stumble or swerve till she came to the slough, dry now, at the bottom, and began to climb the turfy slope beyond. If a startled rabbit scuttled away, rustling through bracken already sear, she gave it no thought.

"It's the trees I'm wanting," she told herself, "the kind, still trees. The moss will be cool and soft, and I'll sleep there. . . ." She did not put into words where she was going, but her feet carried her swiftly as one who knew.

Suddenly in the darkness a small orb of fire. No firefly: it was still. No glowworm: it was dull red. And it moved a little —vanished. She did not remember then how a cigar-tip may burn through darkness.

She put her hands to her throat, stood, too terror-struck to turn and fly, till the shadows under the oak seemed to thicken, there was a swift scratching sound and a trail and spurt of light, and she saw . . . before the match fell to the ground, and heard . . . before the waters rushed into her ears:

"Olwen, my darling! You have come!"

Long after, so long that she could not know where she was or what happened, she tried to lift her head. She was not in her room; she was somewhere among the shadows, and there was no sound. Under her left hand was something cool and soft—moss; her right hand was warm, held warmly by another hand; her cheek was against rough cloth; she put up her left hand and touched short hair.

"You!" she whispered.

And he: "You came!"

"You have been calling me?"

"Many, many nights!"

"Here?"

"Here."

"I remember."

"I wondered if you would."

"Did you think I would come?"

"No."

"Why did I?"

"Well, why did you?"

"I must get up."

"Why that? It's so much easier to be still where you are."

"You wanted me?"

The answer to that could not be in words.

No more fluttering now; she was still as one stepping from the vault of death into the streaming sun might be still for the healing of its light.

"When two have found each other, as we have," he said, and paused.

Her answer was strange: "The other side."

"The other side of what?"

"I don't know. But I'm safe now."

"Of course you are." Was there irritation in his tone? "Were you ever afraid?"

"Not now."

"You were, then?"

"Let's not talk."

"You're right, my sweet. Waste of time."

Beyond the trees the church bell began its slow toll of midnight.

She stirred and struggled a little in his arms.

"Not yet," he said. "Not till you know what life can mean."

"Don't I—yet?"

He laughed. "I think no one has kissed you before, Olwen."

"Of course not," she said. "Why should you think so?"

"I didn't, as I told you."

"And—you?" Her voice faltered.

"What do you think?"

"I don't care—now. I don't care about anything—now."

"You're very emphatic with your now."

"I mean, it's like crossing over—somewhere. . . . I mean, I can never go back now and be the old Olwen. . . ."

"Oh, don't lose her altogether; she was very nice," he said. "Shall I kiss you again, or shall I stop?"

This time he pushed up her nearer sleeve and kissed her arm up to the shoulder, and his swift breathing was against her neck, when, with a jerk, she freed herself and slipped away on the moss.

"I must—" her voice sounded far away.

He defied her: "Well? Must what?"

"You know, go home."

"And the night only half spent? What a waste!"

She knew the mocking tone. Before it had angered her; now she said only: "I don't understand you at all."

"Is it necessary?" he asked, in the same light tone. "Isn't it enough to love me? I hoped you would, since you came."

"Didn't I—enough?"

"If you think so, yes. Run along home then." She could feel, rather than see, that he rose as if to go.

"You are angry?" That would be almost unendurable now.

"Not in the least. But if you don't wish to stay . . ."

"But I do. . . . And I mustn't. . . . What shall I do?"

He had found her again with the embrace that left her helpless. "Are you afraid of living?" he whispered.

But she could only repeat helplessly: "What is it—you want me to do?"

"Nothing, unless you will it yourself. Nothing."

She knew that he was hurt or angry; the timid hand that she put up to his cheek met with no response.

"Oh—I . . ."—she was trembling on the verge of nervous tears—"help me to find out. . . ."

"Come here, then, and listen." And she was again safe in his arms. "Did you ever—do you ever—when you are hot and tired and sick of living shut up in stuffy houses, dream how sweet it would be to be out in the wind among the trees, to throw away the silly trappings of clothes, to lie on the moss . . ."

His voice died away. And somehow, there was a great gap of silence, and his words had come true. She was lying deep in the long, cool moss, with its gentle pricking everywhere against her skin; lying still, afraid to move; breathless, waiting. . . .

And long, long after, when the clouds had gone and stars —innumerable stars—were looking down at her out of the clear sky, she hid her face in her arms and would not be comforted. Somewhere near in the darkness a broken voice, every word of which burned like a trail of fire in her brain, never to be forgotten:

"Olwen, my darling, don't spoil it all—don't. . . . It's all right, I tell you; it's natural. . . . You're safe with me, you know that. . . . Oh, the devil, girl! . . . Little fool! will you stop? . . . I wish I'd never— What the hell do you want me to do? . . . There, there! . . . If you only knew how beautiful you are to me. . . . Some day I'll see you as well as feel, some day we'll— It's all right, I tell you. . . . Damn! will you stop? . . . We've got to get out of this. . . . Put on your clothes, you'll catch cold. I thought it was the most wonderful thing in life we were having, and now you . . ."

She lifted one arm from her face—he could see her dimly in the starlight—and whispered, "Will you go . . . ?"

"I can't leave you yet . . ." he was beginning.

Suddenly she was on her feet, a white shadow among the trees—gone!

He stumbled after. What next? What next?

Down the turf-overgrown Roman road, with here and there

a stone that cut or twisted his ankle, now fancying a glimpse of her, white among the trees, losing her again, pricked and scratched where the track narrowed between the gorse, he plunged, tripping and catching his balance, seeing and losing the fleeing figure in front. God! what next?

The way parted, and he went wrong. To the left, a gasping cry and a splash.

He plunged blindly among the stars shining at his feet, water sedges to his waist, tangle of weeds about his feet, a floating branch that seized him like a clutching hand, slippery stones and mud—receding as he slipped lower and caught vainly at the air for something to cling to; but in his other hand he was gripping with the last of his strength a limp arm.

She had not really gone under; nor perhaps could she have stayed there if she had—the pond was hardly up to her neck, standing. But when it was all over, there she was, dripping and ridiculous, being carried back to the great oak that had sheltered the madness and the desperation of her first awakening to love.

"Are you all right?" he demanded, trying to look at the face that she was pressing against his neck. The stars had gone under again, and he could not see the rough road, staggering like a drunken man under his burden.

"Put me down," she whispered. "I know every inch of the way."

He made no reply, but persisted in carrying her to the end.

"Go away while I dress," she said, out of a darkness suddenly denser.

The soft August air had dried his body, and he shook his hair and rumpled it until it was almost dry. But hers she wrung with her hands. . . .

"Dry, darling?" he ventured.

"I'm almost ready." Her voice sounded cold and hard. Hadn't she heard him, or what?

He found her arm; she was shaking as if with ague.

"Oh, I say, here's my coat," he insisted.

"You're angry with me? I was mad," she said, so low that he could barely hear.

"No. Yes. . . . Are you sure you're in your right mind now?"

He could feel that she nodded.

"Then I'll tell you how I feel. I'd like to make a trumpet of my hands and shout, long and hard. I haven't felt like that for years. Now it's over, it was one great adventure, and the last was a part of the first."

She drew away from his arm. "That's—one way of looking at it."

"Not yours?"

"I don't know mine—yet. There's tomorrow."

"Damn tomorrow. Come back here tomorrow night. That will make it all right. Will you?"

"I don't know—yet. There's tomorrow first."

"But why should tomorrow be different from yesterday? Good Lord! You don't think I've hurt you, do you?"

She was silent.

"You do, then. You'll make me wish I'd never seen you, if you go on like this . . ."

"Oh, no!"

"Well, then, have some sense. You want to live, and you don't want to; eat your cake and keep it. What can I say to a notion like that? You belong in a convent; you'd be safe there from brutes like me!"

"You're—you're . . ." But she could not find words.

"Yes, my dear. But I'm wondering how I can get some common sense into your head. I thought up among the trees

there—till you ran amuck—and even after . . . But now all this puling. Have you no spirit, my girl?"

And, after all, her voice startled him with its sudden composure: "I hope so. I shall find the way out."

"No more nonsense, mind. I shall not always be there to pull you out. Promise? All right, then. Look here, my dear child. How silly you are! If we two had stood up in church before the gaping townspeople and let a man in a surplice read over us a ritual devised by our Elizabethan, or pre-Elizabethan, forefathers, you'd feel all right about the whole situation, wouldn't you? What difference can it make? What difference can it possibly make? A ring, is it? I'll give you a ring some day—and a pretty one, too. You must get rid of your old superstitious ideas. Marriage isn't for free people, like you and me . . ."

"All right," she said. "I'll do anything you say. But you're not to come further. I'll go back as I came."

"Kiss me good night, then; and go home and sleep and dream. No, don't dream. And tomorrow night . . ."

"No," she gasped, and ran away from him in the darkness.

This time he did not follow. She had promised.

And the burden of her heavy thought, as she stood with her hand on the door she was afraid to open, was: "Tomorrow I shall never be able to look my father in the face."

While she hung there, came a man's voice and a woman's coarse laughter along the wall: "Gie's another—there, do!" said the man.

And Gwen's loud: "You've had too much already, you . . ." and a scuffle. . . .

With her hands pressed to her ears Olwen fled up to her room.

The church clock tolled two.

VI. HE DID NOT MOVE A CHESSMAN

THE clock struck three—and four—and five—and six; and thinking went on and on and round and round, and never came out of its cage at all. And the clock struck seven, and Gwen knocked at the door with the morning tea.

Olwen started up in bed. It was so dark outside, so dark. She had not thought morning had come.

"It'll starrm today, Miss," said Gwen. Were her eyes more shifty than usual?

Olwen took the cup and set it on the table by her bed. Too sick for tea—oh, too sick! . . .

And yet her voice, sounding cool and clear to her astonished ears, was asking: "What time was it when you came in, Gwen?"

"Not so late, Miss." Was there defiance in her thick voice?

"I think it was," said Olwen's clear, cool, detached voice. But she could not look at Gwen.

"Well, then, if it wore"—there was defiance in her voice—"us 'll be cried in t'spring, or before thot maybe."

Was there significance in her "maybe"? Oh, of course, it was customary to make things right if there was question of . . . Even Shakespeare . . .

With a scarcely controlled shudder, Olwen turned her face to the wall: "Tell the Doctor I've a bad headache."

She heard Gwen gulp, and knew her thought: A headache! Miss Olwen?

But there was something more she must know. She turned

back to the staring Gwen: "But where were you, at that time of night?"

Gwen did not ask, "How did you know the time of night?" She merely said sulkily: "We walked to Th' Beeches. It's a long way."

Over the hill, then—just over the hill. Gwen and her collier. . . . And if they had chosen to come back by Joy's Green? . . .

She shut her eyes.

After breakfast came the Doctor, scowling, with a thermometer instead of his comforting pipe.

"Only half a degree," he said; "but half a degree too much. What you been up to, Sister?"

She did not open her eyes. "Headache," she said.

He was blunter than Gwen: "Headache! You? You never had a headache before in your life. Your poor mother. . . . But there's something behind it in your case. Tell me the truth now."

She would have to look at him, meet his gaze. She opened her eyes and found she could; it was not even hard. Was it all nonsense—again—that you couldn't look in the eyes a person you loved and were deceiving?

"It's true that I have a dreadful headache," she said.

"I can see that for myself," he grunted, his scowl not abating. "But a headache's a symptom, not a cause."

"I can't—talk—now," said Olwen.

So he went away, troubled, and came back with headache tablets and a bottle with a black mixture which he called a tonic.

"You'll talk to me later—when you can," he said gently.

"Yes." There was respite, at least.

Then the rains came and streamed against her windows, and the gutters dripped, and the roses at her windows hung their heads, heavy almost to breaking. . . .

"And it was tonight. . . ."

She did not finish the thought. Perhaps the tablets made her drowsy; perhaps it was relief because decision was taken from her; perhaps it was sheer exhaustion. She slept for hours, awakened at last by a strong red sunset across her face. Gwen had not come in even to draw the blinds.

The storm was past; there would be stars; and he, waiting under the oak. No!

Then came an anxious father, and Gwen with medicine and a bowl of hot milk.

"It's so stupid to be ill," she said, when he took the thermometer from her mouth.

"It makes a doctor feel like a fool to have a patient with a temperature he can't account for," he answered drily.

"It's not worth mentioning, is it?"

"Perhaps not, except in a daughter," he said. "If you're not better in the morning . . ."

Yes, what then? She'd have to be better in the morning. Would she be better if she went to the wood just to—just to speak with him a moment; just to be sure he was not—disgusted; just to feel his arms round her as at first, to be kissed and soothed and made to feel it was all right, would come out all right? Would she be better then? It seemed worth trying. But no, not again—never!

The clock struck nine—then ten—then eleven.

She got out of bed and went to the window—softly, as if she must not be overheard, as if some one were lying outside her door, listening and waiting to catch her.

Stars everywhere, like the stars last night—the stars in the pond, just before. . . . She might be lying there now, naked at the bottom of a shallow pond while they searched the countryside. But he had saved her. . . . Oh, if she could but see him a moment—only a moment, just to make everything right! . . .

She slipped into her clothes, opened her door without a sound, listened a moment at her father's door—silence there—and began to creep down the stairs. Every step had its separate creak, and her heart beat like thunder in her ears.

On the landing she all but screamed. The library door was half open, and in the long mirror at the foot of the stairs she could see her father, his pipe in his mouth upside down, the chessboard and a newspaper before him; but his head was between his hands, and he did not move a chessman while she watched.

And at last she crept back to her room.

VII. AS IF HE WERE GOD

BUT of course one lived through the days, taking them one by one—only so many hours, minutes, seconds—86,400 of them. She worked it out with her eyes on the ceiling, the second day after. It seemed a large number, but somehow they passed; it didn't do to mind them.

"Malaria she had," said the Doctor. "Had been down in the bottom after more ferns for the rock garden. What could she expect? Besides, her mother—a little nervous complication, doubtless. . . ."

His diagnosis to his satisfaction, he prescribed large doses of his vile black mixture and a few days in bed. After that, he said vaguely, they might go somewhere for a change, they two. Oh, beyond Gloucester—London, perhaps, or Brighton. Some place where she could be cheered up with a bit of life. . . .

A bit of life, thought Olwen, and smiled; and he, misunderstanding her smile, was delighted.

He brought her his latest bargain—a whole world's library in twenty fat volumes, at a shilling a volume, worth ten times that when new, and "Shall I read you something, my dear?"

To please him she said, "Yes." He brought up Number One.

"These first ones look rather dull," he apologized. "Ever read *Savitri and Savritana?* No? Suppose we try that?"

She listened, passively at first; then the story caught her and she raised herself on one elbow. Could a woman love so

much as that? Could she? Was that the way out—to love through everything, beyond everything, to the farthest end? Was that the way out?

That night she did not hear the bells. She slept and dreamed that she was running down endless dark corridors, and behind her came hurrying feet of—she knew not what. But far away, a mere pin-point of light, was the keyhole of a door through which light streamed. If she could get there, if she could open the door, she would be safe, for Anthony Kingsland was there, waiting for her. He did not know she was coming, but he had been waiting night after night. She ran till her knees ached and she had no breath, ran until her heart thumped almost out of her body; and the footsteps came louder and nearer, and she would have screamed, but she could not; and something caught at her skirt with a tearing sound . . . and—the edge of the door was in her hand, for it was not quite shut; and she was in the light on the other side, and she heard a bolt shot and she was in his arms and safe—and awake in the grey dawn. And she was trembling still with the joy of having found him, now lost so soon.

But the dream, for all its horror, gave her a kind of courage: "There must be a way out. I shall find the way out."

The day was more peaceful; she had Savitri to think of—and her dream. Her temperature was gone, and the Doctor said his mixture had done the trick and she might be up tomorrow. So she let the hours drift by, not caring greatly, but no longer in self-torment. . . .

It was a day when voices carry far; and some time, late in the afternoon, she heard two men talking outside in the garden: her father and— No, it could not be. But they went on talking; and once, when he laughed, she got up and looked from behind the curtain to see if it could be true.

Undoubtedly, he was there, and undoubtedly he was laughing, squinting a little in the sun and looking as if there were

nothing in the world but the joke he had just heard. When they came under the window, as they would in a few moments, she could hear every word they said if she stayed behind the curtain. But it would be eavesdropping; she would not stay. Yet she did not get away soon enough. He was saying: "I should think so. You might even take her to Paris or Italy, sir. It's easy travelling nowadays; and seeing the world is the best cure there is for the . . ."

That was all. For the what? It sounded almost as if he wanted to be rid of her. See the world now? It was too late to see the world now. She wanted only— What did she want?

The next night she came down for supper, strangely weak after so slight an illness, but with some pretence of her old spirits.

No great pretence was needed, for the Doctor was full of his new plans.

"We might go to Paris," he said, "or even Italy. I was in Paris once when I was a young chap—your mother and I; in fact, it was on our wedding trip. It'll be changed, likely . . . Italy now. I've never been to Italy, and I've always wanted to go to Italy. I don't know what put it into my head lately that we might go to Italy this winter. We could manage the expense, I think. . . . You know your Virgil and your Dante. We might have a good time in Italy. . . ."

"And what about the practice?" Olwen reminded him.

There was young Gibbs, he answered, as she knew very well; and glad of the chance. A coming-on chap, smart! Push him off the perch, likely, if he didn't get out of the way soon. He'd have it all some day. Pity, he added, she didn't take more to young Gibbs.

"I take to him well enough," she said. "He's business, that's all—Lancashire. He'll get on."

"But you like Jack better?" he persisted.

He did not see how she caught her breath. "No. As for

that, I want nothing to do with men—any of them," she said with passion.

"Oh, very well, Miss," he chuckled. "That being the way the wind blows, we'll talk of Italy."

And because Italy was on his mind, he got out *The Merchant of Venice* and read aloud scenes that they both knew by heart.

And Olwen, sitting by the window, felt rather than heard the words, "In such a night . . . in such a night . . . in such a night . . ."

This might be such a night, though it was still the dark of the moon. The air was sweet and dewy, and the leaves stirred ever so faintly. It was a night for love. Love? What was that?

She went upstairs early, but she could not sleep. Not her own troubles only, but the very sweetness of the air held her long wakeful. Yet at last she drifted away; and started up with a small cry as a bird flew in the window and lighted on her bed. But it was very still for a bird. She lighted the candle to see what ailed it.

It was no bird. It was a flat pebble with a paper tied about it:

"Come to the terrace—now."

She did not think of refusing, though she trembled so that she could scarcely dress. Perhaps he had found a way out, the way she could not find.

Soon enough the dew-laden branches were shaking their drops on her as she brushed them aside in her swift passing. And there he was—a shadow by the summer-house.

"Well?" he said, and made no step forward.

She drew back a step: "Well? You sent for me and I came."

It was obvious that if he had nothing to say she would go back as quickly as she had come.

"Shall we go in?" he asked. "You've been ill. I'm sorry. Are you sure you're warm enough?"

She brushed all that aside: "If you've nothing to say to me . . ."

"Well"—he seemed hesitant or embarrassed—"I thought, as you're a thinking person, you'd probably have something to say to me. I thought I'd better come and—and hear—and answer if I could."

She moved a little, and her arm brushed his sleeve: he was nearer than she thought. Then the wall was down between them, and they were in the summer-house, with everything forgotten but the rapture of clinging arms and lips.

He was the first to speak: "Is there a bench somewhere? You shall sit on my knee and tell me all about it. . . . May I smoke?"

But she could not begin, and he said at last: "It's so strange to me—strange past believing—that you're so happy in this, and not in that."

"In the wood, you mean?" she managed to ask.

"Yes. Why not? What is it? Silly modesty?"

"Is it silly? I suppose I'm made that way. Aren't—most women?"

"Most? I've known only a few . . ."

"And—they weren't . . . ?"

"Lord! what a question! You ought to have lived in the eighteenth century. Why don't you faint and have hysterics and ask to be made an honest woman?"

His jeering cut deep: "We're old-fashioned in the Forest. But—if you'll only tell me what's the matter . . ."

He was blunt: "You're temperamentally cold, perhaps. If so, there's nothing to do. You can't help it."

She clung close: "I'm not! I'm not! You see!"

But he would not lay down his cigar to respond.

"How can I show you? What is it you want?"

"Nothing you don't want yourself," was his astounding answer.

She repeated his words, as if failing to take in their sense. "But all I want is to be with you—always. I'd be happy then."

"I think not. I'd get drunk and beat you, and throw you out of the window. Perhaps you'd like that? Some women seem to. At least they stick."

"But—but what's to be the end of this?"

"How can I tell? I'm no God."

"You have no plan? I thought you might have some . . . no plan at all?"

"What plan could I have?"

"What am I to do, then?"

"What did you do before I came?"

"Oh, but I'm not that girl. I can't—can't live without you—now."

He threw his cigar through the open door with a little trail of sparks. He was silent a moment, then he said, gathering her close, as if to lessen the sting: "Well, my girl, and I can't live with you. So there we are. What's to be done?"

"You couldn't—try?"

"How—try? Marry you, you mean? I've told you what would happen."

"You can't—possibly—know."

"It's one of the few things in the world I am sure of."

"You don't love me, then."

"Yes, from the first moment, I think. Are you still under the delusion that marriage and love go together? Well, I can't talk you out of that; you'll have to live out of it."

She drew herself out of his arms and sat apart, as she asked: "What is it, then? Marriage?"

He laughed a little, she could not tell for what, and quoted:

"'I wol nat seyn, how that hit is the cheyne
Of Sathanas, on which he gnaweth ever. . . .'

You see, I know my Chaucer too."

"Chain, yes," she said. "I've read and heard that many a time. But what is it for?"

"What for? For the procreation of children. . . . Don't be shocked; I'm quoting from the Prayer Book. Without the institution of marriage there'd be no more children. Didn't you know that?"

"Oh, if it's a time for satire," she said, with breaking voice. She was thinking of Gwen and her "ye've had too much." How could one live on in a world like this?

He was quickly penitent, fumbled for and found her hand: "Forgive me, dear. The truth is, I don't know what to say to you. Everything I say is wrong."

"If you could make me understand . . . ?"

"What?"

"Why you are as you are . . ."

"That would go back to my father and mother," he said, "and the long trail of my ancestors; back to old Anthony, who gambled or drank away his homestead and lands; back of him to—Lord knows what! I can't explain. But perhaps I can tell you a few things you don't know—if you want the truth, if you can bear the truth?"

"I can bear anything," she said, "but things as they are."

"So can most of us," he began, almost as if he would laugh again; but he cut himself short: "I'll try. Well, now, you want to be married to me so that you can be with me all the time. But I prefer to be alone most of the time. Perhaps I'm no good as a writer, but I can't write at all knowing there's somebody about trying not to disturb me. . . . Oh, you will say, some writers do marry. But I'm not talking about them; I'm talking about myself. . . . You'd want to

help me, of course; but—Lord!—what could you do? And if you did— Do? I'll do my own job, thank you. . . . You think you could take care of me and make me comfortable. . . . Mother! mother! . . . I don't want to be taken care of; I'm comfortable as I am. I don't need any more than I've got—a bed and a chair, a pipe and a mug of ale, food when I'm hungry and a table to litter with papers when I feel like it. I don't like fringes and cushions and fal-lals; I don't want to be tidied up, even periodically. See? I'm not a domesticated animal—yet. . . . And as for children, I know too much about the Kingslands. . . . Rotten! I mean to be the last. . . . There's more than that to it. I've come back from the War smashed; but I'm not going to talk about it. No! I tell you the bare fact. Nerves, if you like; can't trust 'em. And all that's part of what's in my mind about marriage. And you can't change it—not even you, with all your sweetness. . . ."

"And there's—nothing—I could—do for you?"

"Oh, yes, if you liked; but you don't."

She understood; but before she could find a way of speaking he went on. It was as if a dam had broken and the waters could not be stopped.

"My father married for money, you know. That was a life of it—theirs! And yet my mother was a good woman and she was in love with him—at first. She told me once. It had worn off, of course, by the time I came along. . . ."

"Why 'of course'?" she flashed.

"Because that's the nature of it, my child. It's the sweetest thing in the world while it lasts; isn't it, now? Isn't it? Oh, you don't think so; but it wears out like any other toy—tin whistle or jam tart or toy balloon. They're all the same—momentary, not the stuff men live by . . ."

She remembered Savitri. . . . What was it in her heart that she lived by? She wondered if he knew the story, but she did not ask.

"It was a successful marriage," he went on. "They had a good time in the world. She did not grudge the money—which was the main concern of my father. Rather a charming old boy he could be when he liked. They got on very well—no children to bother them except me, and I looked out for myself pretty much from the first, and went off to school at six. . . . And here's a funny thing: there wouldn't have been even me to trouble the world if my mother had had her way. She wouldn't, as the Prayer Book says, submit herself to her husband, you know; but once when he was drunk he broke the lock of her door, swearing he wouldn't die without leaving another Kingsland to inherit the place. He had his eye on it, you see, and he knew. Pride, I suppose. But after that she hated him. Not strange, of course. . . . I didn't go home for holidays often, but now and then it happened. . . . Hell for both, nothing less; but hers was the worst, I fancy. She couldn't get drunk, you see. . . . She must have been glad to die. . . . Do you see why I have told you all this?"

"Yes," said Olwen.

"And you mustn't forget that I've got the Kingsland blood; neither Marlborough nor Cambridge thinned it much. And I'd done pretty much as I pleased with the little bit of money my father didn't run through before he died. . . ."

"And then?" she asked.

"And then the lease fell in and I came down here—to get over the War if I could—and found you; and hadn't the sense to let you alone. I wish to God I had!"

"Don't!" she cried sharply. "Not that, at least."

"So you don't wish it!" He laughed again. "And I've been thinking that was what was the matter with you. There's no understanding any woman."

She surprised him with the sudden level quiet of her tone: "All the while I've been trying to think—really think straight, not just feel. If there's anything certain, it's that we—I—can't

go back! I must go on. I want to go on in the way best for —for us both. If there's anything—anything I can be to you, let me."

She laid a pleading hand on his knee, but did not move nearer.

"If you were not yourself, my dear; but you are yourself. . . ."

"If I were another woman, what would she do?"

"You have a talent for unanswerable questions. Would any two of them do quite the same thing?"

She would not give up her point: "But if I were the one you—you liked best in the world, what would she do?"

He did not answer promptly or directly: "Some women could be quite happy going on as before and coming up to the High Wood now and then—or elsewhere." He added quickly: "But evidently not you."

Again she surprised him: "Perhaps. But it would be leading a double life, wouldn't it?"

"Would it be the town's business? There are difficulties in any way of living."

"I was thinking of my father," she said.

He was silent.

"But if I have to choose . . ."

"You don't," he interrupted curtly.

She went on: ". . . between giving you up and— Oh, I can't do without you! I can't!"

And he had said she was cold!

She did not have her way, however; it lasted only a moment this time—the sweetness of love. He jerked away, saying roughly: "But it's not going to be like that with us. I'll have no woman sacrificing herself to please me!"

Her incoherent pleadings, her timid kisses, her clinging hands had no effect.

"No," he said. "We'll make an end of it, here and now.

I'm sorry you've been so unhappy; but, my God, I've not hurt you! And some day you'll be glad of even this little we've had."

"But let me . . ."

"You can't go against your own nature, my dear; you can't live my way . . ."

"I could!"

". . . and I can't live yours. We've got to make an end of it. I don't want you on any terms which you could propose. And that's final."

"And what am I to do?" she asked.

"Go abroad and forget—forget everything except what you like to remember. You haven't learned yet how easy it is to do that."

"No, I haven't learned that yet."

"You will. You'll be surprised at yourself. People get over such things—and much worse . . ."

"And you?"

"Oh, while you're away I'll pack up and clear out. No particular reason why I should inhabit the uninhabitable home of my ancestors. Just a fancy! The Pricketts will breathe easier when I'm gone."

"But you'll come back—some day?"

"Surely—some day. Why not? When I'm so old and bald that you wonder what you ever saw in me, and when you've a large family of children. . . ."

"Don't!"

"All wrong again, eh?"

"There's no comfort in any of it."

"There's no comfort in anything but time; and there's nothing time cannot heal. I've found that out."

"I'll be going in." She rose suddenly.

Still he tried: "Tomorrow won't be so bad as tonight; and you'll be off to Italy in a few days. You'll see."

As if he were God—quite as if he were God!

"Is that all for good-bye?" he asked.

"What's the use . . . ?" But then she turned, and it seemed as if she could not let him go.

So at last she went slowly through the wet garden, with the dew everywhere dropping on her like tears as she brushed the branches in her blind going.

Italy . . . she would be going to Italy soon; and he—just as if he were God!

VIII. YET SHE DID NOT GO TO ITALY

YET she did not go to Italy, after all.

If she had gone to Italy and had come back to find him away. . . . But the Forces that shape lives made something very different of this infinitesimal tangle of atoms called Herself that believed they suffered.

There was no reason in the world—or was there a reason unknown?—why the morning after, only the morning after, the Doctor should find by his plate at breakfast an offer from an agent for the bit of land that still remained of the mother's property in North Wales. Whatever the reason, it had the advantage of withdrawing her father's attention completely from her haggard face.

"Building lots," he chuckled. "That means money. We shall be rich, my dear; well-to-do, at least. We shall have money to spend in Italy. I shall have to go and see the business through. It will take some days, perhaps, with boundaries and leases and all. Will you come, or will you stay?"

"I will stay," she said. "There's much to be done in the garden."

"Ah, Wagtail was asking me only this morning. You must help him to plan for next year."

To plan for next year—to be sure, there was planning to be done for next year; she would be coming back from Italy in the spring.

After breakfast there was the packing and the sending for young Gibbs to take instructions as locum, and some last

mending, and after the Doctor had gone there were various commissions to carry out, which filled the day.

But when the tea-tray had come and gone, almost untouched, Olwen's wavering purpose hardened to resolution: "I will go and see. I cannot leave things like this. We must try again. There must be some way—some other way."

At the farm gate her courage failed, and she turned in to see Mrs. Prickett to gain a moment's time; and perhaps that was well, for Mrs. Prickett had news for her.

"No, there won't never be no word now, Miss. 'E couldn't go on for a year and not let 'is poor Mam know w'ere 'e wore, could 'e now? Not even if 'e'd lost 'is memory 'e'd remember that. It's dead 'e is and under the sod in some strange land; and I'll never know, I'll never know where. . . . If they could 'a' brought 'im back so's we could 'a' put flowers on his grave, like; but it's keepin' 'im abroad among they strangers that breaks the 'eart. . . . God's will be done, says Parson; but 'e don't know: 'e's got no son—only daughters, like. . . . And what's to come of the farm when 'is father dies? That's wot I awsk you. . . . No, Miss, 'e's no better, nor will be—poorly, poorly! But now that my gentleman's gone . . ."

"Gone?" asked Olwen. "Where?"

"Ah, that's wot I don't know, Miss. Didn't 'e tell you? Went at ten o'clock this marnin'; and me all afluster to get 'im off. But 'e would go."

Ten o'clock? The same train with her father. But that told nothing.

"What's he gone for?" asked Olwen; and her voice had quite the tone of one asking for news to pass on.

" 'E didn't say. But I think it's 'is poor narves. Said the country was dull-like, after a bit, and 'e 'ad to get away; 'e'd be back some time; and I was to leave the things as they wore and to keep the 'ouse aired. . . ."

Well, there was much more to be heard and commented on; but that was the sum of it. He had feared her coming, then; and now there was nothing to do but make ready for Italy—Italy, where one forgot. . . .

Yet she did not go to Italy.

IX. PERSPECTIVE

FOR one of the strange things about life is that it is not a continuous glow, but a thing of high flames and ash. Only now and then the high flaming, but long, long days that are ashen. . . .

So it was with Olwen when her summer passion was over. Something like this was in her mind vaguely as she sat on a garden bench and watched Wagtail busy with shears at the hedge-pruning. This was proper time for it, between seasons, he was mumbling, and the twin peacocks by the gate into the rose-garden were bristling and shaggy for want of the shears.

When the fires of one's life are burned out—and so it may seem at twenty-five, in bitterest reality—and one must go on thinking, why, one must think about what is near at hand; and there was Wagtail, whom one had never particularly thought about before. . . . Seventy-five if a day—Wagtail; though, to be sure, he could not tell his own age. Forest-born, and soon to be no more than a green mound in the Forest: for who should put him up a headstone, and why? Yet he would have lived somehow, and for the greater part of a century; and he was content with life: there were fragments of a quavering hymn among the flying sprays of privet. . . . Look at him, moving stiffly—he must have bad pains in his poor joints—his rosy face wizened as an apple in the spring, his clothes mossy with wear and age, his boots

clotted with the red earth. How much more was he than a lump of the red earth?

But yes, something: look at his handiwork with the peacocks, tails outspread. No easy thing to do—she had tried. If there was any reason why a privet hedge should be cut into cannon balls, and umbrellas, and peacocks, Wagtail had his place in the world, and his reason for singing hymns of contentment as he slashed away branches.

But he was coming up now with something to say: "Them sweet sultans, Miss, didn't do nothing under the 'edge; we won't 'ave 'em no more. There's a lot of pretty sweet fernses up to Joy's Green. I'll fetch a load or two when the frost's come, and maybe with a bit o' old man to the right . . ."

He was thinking—yes, he thought about his garden: his by reason of the sweat he poured into it. . . . Something more than the earth, something able to make the earth more beautiful. That was a curious thing. Gardener he had been more than sixty years—so much he knew—and for the greater part of the time, it was this garden he had been making: his lifework, and he loved it. Could one put all one's love, one's life, into the making of a garden?

"Old man," she thought, southernwood. But I like "old man" better. And he wanted to bring ferns from Joy's Green, where that night. . . . Well, but why not? That night was gone into the darkness as if it had not been. . . . No, not that. But let him have his way. No more sweet sultans; ferns and old man.

Twenty bob a week since the War, and thought himself lucky. He remembered the time when he had fourpence an hour, and nothing when the ground was too mucky for digging. Yes, and he had married on that, and had three children —two daughters, one married to a cowman, the other to a blacksmith in one of the pits, and a son. Yes, his name was

on the brass tablet with thirty-seven others—Reuben Wagtail (why Reuben?)—in Whitecross Church. Just of an age to drop the spade with glee when recruiting came to the Forest. Trained a little, and killed as soon as he went up; his reward a name among thirty-eight on a shining brass tablet with a vase of flowers on each side. That was the life of Reuben Wagtail, ended four years ago at nineteen. And what difference had it made to any one that he had ever lived? To his mother—oh, yes, to his mother—a small, pale, silent woman. She had cried little when the black news came, but she had followed him soon to the earth. And now his old father could be quavering out hymns as he pruned. It might be something to know your son was washed in the blood of the Lamb and standing among the saints in glory—that Wagtail boy with a crown!—but twenty bob a week couldn't make up much to an old man who did for himself, washing and all, in one room of a row of cottages. Saving for his burial—that's what he was doing with his old-age wealth; to have it decent-like. And so it would be, with the Vicar reading words that no one listened to in his flat Oxford voice, and the daughters sobbing behind their veils for the old father they had neglected in his life. . . . But that was not yet. Meanwhile he had his garden, a garden not his own, and—there was the puzzle—asked no questions of life or of God, and was content.

It was the curse of thinking. Always at it and never coming out anywhere. . . . Like the men in the pits, pecking away, week after week and year after year, at a black wall, and the coal falling about them, but never, never boring through to the sunlight. Like that. If one could but throw the mind out of one's head and the heart out of one's body, and live in the work of the hands and the feet. There was sunshine enough. Oh, and butterflies—a cloud of them—now, now—over the zinnia bed. . . .

Back comes Wagtail, with the peacocks finished: it is time for the word of praise and the mid-morning bread and cheese. And when the bread had been munched a little, Olwen said suddenly:

"Wagtail, I'm going to Italy soon."

He stopped in a bite: "Italy? That'll be abroad, Miss? Do you want to go to they strange places?"

"Not now," she said. "Once."

"There it is." He went on with his eating. "Them's can don't want: them's can't . . ."

"Not you, Wagtail; you couldn't leave your garden."

"But once," said Wagtail, throwing crumbs at a cheeky strayed hen, "once I wore young and foolish; and I 'ad my dreams, Miss. . . . They never took me no furder than Gloucester. But that wore a fair big town them days; and I come back quick enough—quick enough to the Farrest. . . . Well."

"You wouldn't like Italy, I think," said Olwen, only to prolong the talk a little; she had the day to get through.

"What's it like there, Miss?" His small bright eyes were alert with curiosity.

"I'm not sure—I've only read about it and seen pictures. I don't think there's much grass."

"No grass!" said he, staring. "Larrd! what do they feed the cows with?"

She said she thought they had goats.

"Goatses?" he asked. "Like in the Bible?" He was full of questions. What were the folkses like yonder? Did they talk like we, or did they have a way of speaking of their own? Did they have gardens, like?

She told him at last that it was the Romans—to whose city she was going—who had made the old road at the end of the garden.

"To be sure they did," he said. "But this is the first I've 'eard as them wore Eyetalians. And that minds me, Miss; it

minds me of a thing I've been carrying round in my pocket to show ye for near a week."

Among string and bast and nails and a copper or two he had it at last—a small, thin, bent, irregularly round silver disc, with the dim outline of a head and a few letters still to be read:

TIB . . . CAES . . . PMTR . . . II. . . .

"It's a silver denarius—a penny," she said; "of Tiberius, it must be. Nearly two thousand years old, Wagtail. Where did you find it?"

"Yander"—he jerked his head over his shoulder—"when I grubbed up th'ald 'edge by th'ald road."

"Yes," she said, "some Roman dropped it and the hedge grew over it; and here it is." . . . But where was the Roman? Not among the saints in heaven with Reuben Wagtail; that was sure. And not in his own Elysian Fields—at least, no good Christian thought so. Where, then? Merely red earth, the raw stuff from which was made his own armour.

After Wagtail had gone back to his hedge she went through the garden and out by the lower gate—the gate through which Kingsland had come in some earlier lifetime—into the Roman road. It led to Joy's Green; but she would not go there. Never again . . .

It was the road itself she was looking at, as if she had never seen it before. Who knew how many more silver pennies lay under its bordering hedges and walls? All that was left of the Romans who had built it save the stones themselves; and these were fast going, carried off to mend walls and paving, for stepping-stones and doorstones. In a few years this road, like all the others that had once run like a network through the Forest, would be gone beyond all tracing.

She was fumbling for a thought; and at last it came in the word *perspective*. Perspective, that was the thing. To see life

in perspective, with all its parts in true relationship. And there was a perspective of time as well as of space. That was why she had come out to the old road—so that she could feel it. If one remembered all the thousands of lives that had passed up and down between these almost vanished kerbs, on these once-squared, now broken and uneven stones, one realized the unimportance of one's own life, with its desires, its needs, and its pains. . . . Thousands of them, thousands of them; men and women, just like the Forest folk today, who carried on the blood; just like Dingle and Pirkis and Wagtail and her own father, for the matter of that; just like Gwen and Emily Hughes and Sal Morgan and old Mol up the hill—like herself, for the matter of that. But most of them content enough with bread and cheese and a fire to sit by and the children God sent, with maybe a dog or a cat and some chickens, and rabbits for the catching, and in the old days a King's deer, now and then; and if you went far enough back, tattooed—like sailors . . . Just common dirty people in woollen clothes, like old Mol, who gathered bundles of sticks in the wood and carried them home on her back for her firing—people with nothing to think of but the need of getting food and warmth, with the labour of toil for the men and of child-birth for the women; and then old age, useless by the hearth, with rheumatism and toothache—till the teeth were gone, and there was but mumbling for speech. . . . And that was all of life; and at the end of it, decent burial and a green mound on the sunny side of the church. All— But they seemed to find it enough. Then why couldn't she?

Suddenly she remembered a time, a dozen years before, when she was picking up acorns on the hill for a doll's tea set and came suddenly upon old Mol, with her great bundle of firewood on her back and her queer brown wool cap, like a child's cap, drawn low over her ears and eyes.

"Hey," called out Mol. "Now who be you; ye queer little, slim little thing by yerself, like?"

And upon her answer that she was the Doctor's little girl, the old woman had chuckled and shown toothless gums: "Nay, but I thought ye wore from the pixies. Ever hear tell of them, my dear?"

But she had outgrown fairies, and told Mol there was no such thing.

All she had for reply was a chuckling: "Much you know! Much you know! There's worlds and worlds; and ye're not of this one, ye're not. Where are you when ye're not in yerself, eh?"

"I'm thinking," she had answered.

"More's the pity for you!" said old Mol.

And had she not been right?

Up and down the Roman road—no one coming or going now—empty as the heart of the Forest. There would never be any one coming. . . .

Oh, well, she was for Italy as soon as Dad came back from the North.

Perspective—that's the thing.

X. THE END OF AN ENDLESS NIGHT

THREE weeks of it like that—three weeks and nothing else but that sort of thing. Then came October and the garden at its best, with chrysanthemums and dahlias, rank upon rank of crimson and brown, orange and white and gold; and the green-hearted moon daisies all along the hedge; and the leaves making flowers of themselves. . . .

The Doctor wrote that the business was near finished at last, and there would be a first cheque for them to spend in Italy; it would make her hold her breath. He would be coming home on Saturday, and she was to meet him with Grizel and the cart and give an account of herself.

She managed—oh, she managed very well: she was learning to manage.

"Ye're thinner," he said at once.

"I'm not," she retorted; "but you're fatter. You see things out of proportion."

"Well, ye've turned sassy, at least," he said, picking up the reins. "And now what's the news?"

"Fie!" she said. "You coming fresh from the world and asking for news? Give us your own."

So he did; and she was glad to be still and listen.

"When shall we be going?" she asked. What was there to stay for?

"Next week," he said. "As soon as ye can get yourself ready."

But when he stepped through the library door into the

garden he shook his head: "God! we can't leave all this yet. We'll just have to wait a week or two till the best of them are gone. Italy will keep."

So that week passed and the next; and then came the great frost.

In the morning the garden was burnt black. They walked among ruins. And there stood Wagtail, with his cap in his hand, in the presence of the dead.

"This is the kind of thing," said the Doctor, "that sets a man to thinking. It comes from—who knows where? Who knows for what? And there's no fighting it, no stopping it; it does its work."

"A month before their time," said Wagtail; "all my pretties—all."

There were tears in his eyes. Did he grieve for them as a woman for a lost lover?

"What's a month," said the Doctor, "in the course of a million years? Think of a million years or two; then this won't matter. . . . By the way, Olwen, the second copy of my will's in the top left-hand drawer of the old secretary."

"What made you think of that?" She turned with sharp fear.

"Sartain may have put the other away so well he can't find it," he replied.

"But what made you think of it now?" she insisted.

"All this, I suppose"—he waved his pipe. "One day here, safe at home; the next, only the Lord knows where! . . . But we may as well be off to Italy now. There's nothing to keep us. How soon can you be ready?"

"Oh, ready!" she shrugged. "And I've settled with Gwen: she's to go home to her mother's; and she'll be married at Christmas."

"That's a good job," said the Doctor. "She's been carrying on—I'm not blind. But there's no stopping these young fools—

not even an ugly wench like Gwen. I'm glad she's to be married."

At that Olwen went away from him for a time. But what could she do? What was she to think?

At mid-day the sharp weather had changed to a drenching rain. Wagtail gave up his work of clearing away the ruined blossoms.

"Shall I read you about Italy?" asked the Doctor. He was transparently trying to work up his own enthusiasm. He read on and on. . . . The afternoon was slow—slow. . . .

At last he shut the book with a bang—somebody's stupid *Days In*—and said: "Get your storm cape and let's blow down into the village for a breath of air and a gossip. Better than moping up here."

There while he argued politics with the postmaster, Olwen went to the back of the shop and matched the green silk with which she was knitting him a tie for his birthday, only the next week. He would be fifty, turning the corner into old age; but he might well live to be ninety, like his father—a long-lived race the Breams. Her face grew dark.

Going up the hill he took her arm, the wind dead against them; but none the less he hummed, breathlessly and out of tune, but persistently, snatches of "Sweet Mistress Halliday" and "Peggy She Ambles," and "Green's the Gorse," and at last a trumpeting of "Onward, Christian Soldiers."

There was a fire in the library, the first of the season; its flickering glow could be seen from the road. After the rough and windy walk, the warm peace of the room was like a benediction.

"Lass," said the Doctor, "we'll be leaving all this soon—soon." He grumbled in an undertone as he hung up his raincoat and her cape. And then Gwen, in her fresh ruffled apron, brought in the tray.

After tea he sat smoking in silence, seemed to be meditating

things to say, which he did not say. She sat with some book —she could not remember what—not turning a page or reading a word. If he noticed he made no comment.

And in the dusk the rain streamed against the windows and the wind in the tree-tops whistled as in winter.

Suddenly a draught in the room: Gwen at the door with a candlestick crooked and shaking and dripping grease on the floor. Her under lip hung, and she could not speak for stuttering.

"'E says . . . 'e says. . . ." How the candle grease dripped! Olwen ran to take the thing from her hand.

"Who says?" asked the Doctor sharply.

She tried again, caught at a chair, and dropped in an untidy heap. As Olwen bent over her, the Doctor strode past into the kitchen.

He was back in a moment, altering Gwen's position, giving curt directions for her care.

"What is it, Dad?" She had a sense of a thing that pressed against her that must be warded off—a chill and dreadful thing.

"Fellow from the Good Luck. There's been a fall of rock. Six of 'em. Can't get 'em up. Still alive. I'll pick up my bag. Bicycle. You look out for Gwen."

She sprang to her feet: "What can—?" but he was already in the surgery.

He waved a plump hand: "Nothing. Off in a minute. Gwen's your job."

Puffing a little as he hurried down the passage, he called back, "Night, Sister."

"Oh, wait. . . ." Now why did she say that? It was like the cry of an animal. He could not wait; there were hurt men to be cared for—perhaps life to be saved by his quick going. And she would have held him back for no reason at all—no reason; and still she would have held him back.

She ran after him to the door and flung it wide to the streaming rain. Had he stopped to light his lantern? And the roads like . . . "Oh, Dad, come *back!*"

She put her hands to her throat to stifle the cry; she would have run after him, perhaps, through the black rain if there had not been a sound from the girl on the library floor.

Gwen had raised herself on one elbow, and was staring with sullen eyes.

"Sick . . ." she muttered, and lay back with her face in her arm.

"I'll get you . . ." Olwen ran for ammonia.

A sharp scream, abruptly choked: "Where's 'e gone? 'E said as my Bill . . ."

"Gone back. And the Doctor's with him. Perhaps . . ." Olwen tried.

Gwen covered her eyes again with a grimy arm: "No use. 'E's dead. And us to be married come Christmas. . . ."

"Perhaps they'll save them. You don't know. Keep up, Gwen." Olwen tried what she could. But what was the girl mumbling about two hundred pound?

"I can't hear you," she said.

"That's wot she 'ad—that Culver woman at Miry Stock when 'er man wore killed. And left 'er three kids and went off with a young chap just 'ome from the War. That's wot she did. . . . And me . . . nothin'. . . ."

Another scream. Olwen was pushed roughly away.

"Get out!" she gasped and breathed hard. "Lemme be, I tell you!"

Olwen's mind flew back and forth: Young Gibbs? A mile down in the village. . . . But he would be gone to the Pits. Who then? Some old woman—Mrs. Prickett? To run through the rain—that was nothing. . . . But leave the girl groaning? Put her to bed first? Try. . . .

"Get away! I'll mind myself!" Gwen's arm, red and coarse from dirty work, struck her back.

She had to watch the lumpish creature dragging herself like a wounded beast to the hall—to the little room behind the kitchen where she slept.

Once—twice—she made as if to help; and each time she was pushed away, not more by the fierce red arm than by the vile language pierced with groans.

At the door of her dark little room Gwen hung a moment, looked back with glaring eyes: "Lemme be, curse you! I'll mind myself!" and banged the door.

Olwen crept back to the library, shaken, faint. Nothing to do but wait for the morning. She would not go in to that wild thing there. She had a sick horror of what was behind that closed door. . . . Away in the Pits there was lying under earth and rock a mess of blood and broken bones that this morning had answered to the call for Bill Chard. A wiry fellow, not bad-looking with the coal-dust washed off, rather given to jokes and horse-play, given also to drinking and . . . Olwen's mind touched and fled from the ugly word. And there in her dark room lay Gwen in the mess of premature birth.

Olwen went to the hall for her cape; she must call in a neighbour woman. Any one would do, any married woman who knew better than she how to deal with such things. But with her hand on the knob of the outside door, she turned back to the kitchen, where the candle was flaring and guttering out. She found the kitchen lamp and lighted it, put out the candle—a mere spark now in a shapeless mound of tallow—and knocked softly at Gwen's door.

No answer.

"Gwen! May I come in?"

No answer.

Her voice grew shriller with nervousness: "Gwen! Gwen! Let me in!"

She tried the door. It was locked.

A creaking sound as of turning over in bed. Gwen's voice muffled: "I'm all right now, Miss. I don't want nothing. . . ."

"I'm going to get somebody," Olwen persisted. "Mrs. Morgan or . . ."

"God blast ye! Can't you let a poor girl be?"

Olwen crept away. Nothing to do here—nothing. She hung her cape on the rack. The night would pass. The longest nights passed.

In the library the fire had sunk to a dull red; the room was cold.

In the morning early, or perhaps sooner, Dad would come back from the Pit, cold and weary. He would need a good fire, then, and comfort. He would know what to do for Gwen.

She raked out the ashes, and finding no bellows—perhaps Gwen had broken them again—she knelt on the hearth and blew with all her strength. Little trails of sparks ran crookedly in and out among the dying embers; but there was no flame.

It's like that when you're ill, she thought. When the blaze comes back, that's getting well; and when it can't, you die. . . . Fires grow tired in the dead of night. . . . I'll have to go for fresh sticks—I must do that.

She had a horror of going back to the kitchen; it was as if Gwen's key would suddenly turn in the lock and some wild thing would leap upon her and claw her to pieces.

But she made herself go, although she tiptoed across the kitchen floor, listening at every step. No sound from Gwen's room.

The lamp had been turned too high and was smoking the

glass. She turned it down. Then she tiptoed to Gwen's door and laid her ear against the panel. There was a sound within —a sound as of a child suppressing its sobs because its mother would beat it if it made a noise.

Olwen drew a long breath. The poor thing would get on now. But how face her tomorrow? What could she say for herself? Olwen knitted her narrow brows, staring at the blackened glass of the lamp: "But at least—at least there was a lucky escape for one poor little unwanted child. Oh, God—God—God—if there was a listening, watching God who had made things as they were and had let them be!"

She lighted the lantern with a spill at the kitchen range, and ran through the driving rain to the woodshed. There she set her lantern on a shelf and steadied her breath while she looked for a basket. There was something about the place that still jangled nerves. She sat down on a log newly brought in from the Forest; the lichens and mosses on it were still alive, and some bracken had caught in the fork of a stumpy branch.

Outside the whistling drive of the wind and the rain; far away in the Pit Dad trying to save lives; Gwen in her room sobbing away her trouble; here nothing cared for all that—here nothing of all that mattered. It was warm and dry; and there was the smell of bark and of brown leaves and of fresh-cut wood. Here there was nothing alive to suffer; nothing stirred. For suddenly the wind had dropped.

And then—something did stir: a small shadow, scarcely bigger than a walnut among the shadows of the brick floor.

There was no sound, not the slightest rustle; but she was looking at a little mouse that was looking up at her: she could see the gleam of one dark eye in the lantern light. She did not move: she was not startled, only wondering. And seeing her so still, the little thing sat up on its haunches, and lifting its tiny paws before its face—as if begging or

praying, she thought—began the strange little chirping song of the woodmouse.

Olwen held her breath. The storm had lulled for the moment; and here she, encompassed by the horrors of death and of birth, sat alone in a lantern-lit woodshed and listened to the song of a woodmouse.

If there was a God beyond the sky, he must be laughing at this.

What did the little thing want? What did it make of her and the lantern? Why did it sing? What would it do next?

Its song ended, it dropped its forepaws, seemed to look for, perhaps to find, something, and was gone—as it had come—like a shadow.

Olwen filled a basket with chips and sticks and went back and made up the fire. Of all the memories of that slowly-wearing night, none was more poignant than that of the woodmouse. And long after—years after—it came to have a meaning undreamed-of at the time. . . .

She made up the fire, rebuilt the fire; and when it was all ablaze, and she had washed her hands, the clock in the hall struck ten.

And she had thought the night nearly over.

Better to read than to think; yet she could find no book to her liking. She tried Shakespeare—vain oratory! She put the book down with a sigh. The poor man of Stratford had had to please his public, of course. He had nothing for her tonight. Chaucer? But the page to which her purposeless fingers turned was in the Wife of Bath's account of her husbands. No, vulgarity was not what she needed that night. She picked up a modern novel or two, fingered a magazine—dead words—dead wood was better: it burned and gave life.

Was there nothing to do but think?

Handwork, perhaps—that killed all but the foolish drift of the mind. She got out the tie she was knitting for her

father's birthday and the new silk she had bought. She knitted a few stitches, thinking that she might finish it tonight—tonight while he was away. He was so seldom away since he had come back from the North; and his birthday was near.

Then, inexplicably, her blood ran through her veins cold; she shuddered from head to foot. The old people would say some one was walking on her grave, she remembered. Stupid superstition! But she was cold—cold.

She put her knitting away. After all, this was no time to be making a green silk tie, with those poor men in the Pit groaning or dead beneath the rocks. This was no time to be knitting.

She stirred the fire until it blazed high; but she could not get warm. She fetched her father's old tweed great-coat from the hall, and had a certain comfort in its tobacco-soaked roughness. In one pocket she found an old pipe, the meerschaum as brown as rosewood. The feeling of it had something of his power to soothe, and set her blood running more warmly. But if he would only come back—if he would only *come!* It seemed to her she had never wanted him so much in her life. She wanted to creep into his arms and have him sing to her in his creaking falsetto the ballads he had sung to her as a small child—oh, a very small child, soon after her mother died. She wanted. . . . The night was so slow; she could not sleep, she must not think. . . .

There was a fresh gust of wind against the panes. It was no night for men to be out in; and the roads as slippery as ice, and the long hills to be passed. . . . Ah, well, in the morning. . . . He would not try to come back until morning. . . .

It would be wild up at Kingsland this night; with the wind high among the great beeches. But no matter; for Anthony Kingsland was not there. . . . He had gone so far away. . . . Had she ever known him at all? Had she ever . . . in the High Wood . . . at Joy's Green. . . . Incredible! It was not

true: some fantastic trick of the brain had made it seem real. She had never loved Anthony Kingsland, had never believed she loved him. All that was gone out—like the fire before she made it up long ago in the night—yesterday. . . . Embers, perhaps? But what in the world should kindle them again? . . . It was the end, he had said; and he was strangely right. . . . He was so often right. That was because he had lived out abroad in the world. Perhaps one grew wise in the world; it seemed so. . . . But it was incredible that only a few weeks ago it had all meant so much, and now so little, that it should have grown so small, so dead—all the great storm of passion in which she had lived through the summer. Now it was less important than the singing of the woodmouse . . . dim—a name only. . . .

The clock striking . . . ten . . . eleven. . . . God! no more? But what was it that kept one shuddering through the night? Suppose Bill Chard was dead. Gwen would get over it; she would marry some other collier, within the year probably. And perhaps before that she would . . . again . . . like animals. . . . What was it Mrs. Prickett had said once—she had not well understood at the time—about the cows being restless until . . . ? There was some phrase—some ugly phrase which she had gladly forgotten. And after that calves and milk—gallons of milk. And then over again. . . . Cows . . . the whole animal world. . . . Trees were different. . . . Suddenly she remembered herself as a small girl in a temper because she had to learn the battles of the Civil War. "I wish I were a tree!" she had cried with passion.

Her father had seemed to consider it as a proposition before he replied: "Do you know, Sister, I don't somehow fancy they get much out of life."

"You don't know!" she had retorted. At least they did not have school.

"No, I don't know," he had agreed. "In fact, I don't know much of anything."

"You know all the battles of the Civil War," she had defended him from himself.

"Oh, those!" he had admitted. "Yes, those, and some other things—equally useless."

Then she had caught him: "If they're useless, why do I have to learn them?"

"Now I think of it—why?" He had looked at her with a sort of surprise; and not long after that he had stopped her schooling, and taught her what she knew, himself.

She remembered a little more of that talk.

"What *do* trees get out of life?" she had demanded.

"They never told me," he teased. "But I should say they like their leaves, and some of them their flowers or fruits or nuts; or maybe only their beautiful branches—not every tree can be fruitful. And they have their gossips with the sun and the wind and the rain. . . ."

"And what do we?" Her mind was on a narrow track then.

"What do we what?"

"Get out of life, I mean?"

He took a long time to answer; but at last: "I don't know—really; I don't know. There don't seem to be many things that amount to much when you put your mind on them, or are worth the trouble of going after; but I suppose—if I must find you an answer—we get out of life just about what we put into it."

Which was no answer at all, she had thought at the time. Now she pondered over it in one way and another until midnight had come and gone.

Midnight—only midnight! How many hours more till the dawn? It wouldn't be so bad by daylight—things never were. . . . Go to bed? No, but she might pull up the leather couch

by the fire and curl under the old coat. Even if she did not sleep it would be easier waiting so.

Once more she went knocking at Gwen's door. No answer. No sound within. Was she asleep—or dead? Nonsense! Women do not die of such things. . . . Old Mrs. Crabworthy had had thirteen children, and was not dead yet—though most of them were: had died as babies, at that. . . . What was the use of their being born?

She went back to the library and made herself comfortable on the couch; but her eyes were wide-open and expectant; and her brain felt as if its tissues were hard as steel—or glass, maybe. Perhaps they would break. It was too much thinking did that; so Old Mol would have said; so her father had said many a time; so Anthony Kingsland . . . Damn Anthony Kingsland! . . .

She sat up in amazement. She had learned something from Gwen, it seemed.

The wind had fallen again. Was that the sound of horse's hoofs down the street? No, he went on his bicycle. He would come back riding without a sound.

But it was horse's hoofs. They clattered on the paving up to the very door.

Olwen struggled to her feet, and looked at the clock. Quarter to one! Some sickness, then?

She carried the study lamp, with its green shade, into the hall, set it where it would be screened from the draught, and opened the door.

A collier almost as black as the night about him, stammering and mumbling, while his tired horse kicked one foot against the pavement, and the wind swooped again and carried away the mumbled words.

"I tell you he can't," said Olwen, desperate at his stupid repetitions. "He's down at the Good Luck now. There's been a fall. You'll have to try Dr. Gibbs."

So he rode away, cursing under his breath; for his child lay dying of croup and no doctor to be had.

"I will count the ticks of the clock," said Olwen; and then it was past one.

And so she went on counting the seconds as they were ticked off; and she did not hear the striking of two, or of three or of four. . . .

She was awakened by a sense of cold light on her face. Outside was a dead grey dawn and the fire was burned to ash.

XI. SLIDING SCREENS

SHE sat up, shivering. What was it she ought to be doing —now at once?

Outside in the ruined garden the leaves that clung were as still as dead things, and the paths were almost hidden beneath those that had fallen.

What was it she ought to do—now at once?

Voices in the kitchen—at this hour? Oh! Gwen. She must do something about Gwen.

Then, to the utter confusion of all thinking, Mrs. Prickett came in.

It was a dream, of course—not really morning yet. Best lie down again and wait for the morning. . . .

But Mrs. Prickett was bending over her and saying something in her tender, motherly voice.

Olwen narrowed her eyelids to look the closer. Yes, it surely seemed to be Mrs. Prickett, in her grimy working clothes, but with a shawl half falling away from her head, and her hair in a loosened, untidy knob—as if she had run without giving it a thought. And there were tears in her bright brown eyes. What was she saying?

"Are you really Mrs. Prickett?" Olwen asked.

"There, there, my dear; there, there!" Mrs. Prickett seemed to say. Had she come at that hour in the morning only to say "There, there"?

Olwen sat up and threw aside her father's greatcoat: "What's wrong?"

"God's good, my darling!" said Mrs. Prickett. "Never forget that. The Lord gives and He takes away. He took my son. . . ." And, amazingly, she broke into sobbing.

Had she come all that way at this hour in the morning to mourn her son?

It seemed to the girl that all the blood in her body was ebbing away. There was something to be known. . . . But it was not true—no!

And she could not ask.

"And you all alone through the night here," Mrs. Prickett went on, as if somehow that were the thing to grieve for.

"There's Gwen," said Olwen, frowning at the hateful memories that pushed up. Soon—soon her father would come back, and she could forget all these horrors in his arms.

"Ah, yes; Gwen, now," said Mrs. Prickett, as if somehow she found relief at the mention of Gwen.

"In bed. Sick," said Olwen. Then the time had come. "You'd better tell me," she said.

"My lamb, you must bear up," said Mrs. Prickett, twisting her hands in her apron.

"My father—is it?"

"Spruce Hill, darlin'. Oh, ye know the turn by the brook. . . ."

"Not—drowned," said Olwen, under her breath.

"Oh, no, no, no; nothing like that. . . ."

"He's dead," said Olwen. But of course it was not true. If Mrs. Prickett could do no more than weep, why had she come up? And why was Mrs. Prickett pushing her back on the sofa? She had been lying down half the night.

"He's dead," she repeated. But of course it was not true. What was true? She must find out.

"Where is he?" she asked, refusing to be moved.

"Them's bringing 'e 'ome," said Mrs. Prickett. "And the roads like ice."

"When did it happen?" asked Olwen. She listened for the reply; but her mind saw the sharp turn at the bottom of Spruce Hill. There was a bridge with a stone kerb; she had missed it by a hair's breadth more than once, riding with her father, in fine weather; and now with the roads like ice . . .

"This marnin'," said Mrs. Prickett. "Some of the men found 'im coming 'ome from the Pits. Went after the young Doctor, they did; but 'e wore away at Whitecross. Then they come for I, and got I out of my bed. . . ."

But Olwen had caught the sound of subdued voices in the kitchen. There were things to be done: one could not listen for ever to an old woman talking. . . .

It was not true, of course—the whole of life did not slide away like that. . . . But meanwhile there were things to be done. He must not be kept waiting outside—at his own door.

"Where is he now?" she asked.

At Humbledene, it seemed; they were waiting . . .

"No need to wait," said Olwen.

With clenched hands she stood by the window and saw them come. Somebody was sobbing in the room, but not she.

Once she turned to Mrs. Prickett: "The last hill—the very last. In five minutes more he would have been safe." As if something had lain in wait and caught him at the turn of the road.

"Don't talk to me of God's will now," she said. "I've that to think about later."

Then they were at the garden gate—four men without their caps, their eyes gleaming strangely in their black-streaked faces. They had found boards or something; and one of them had laid his own shabby coat. . . .

She was waiting for them in the hall: "Upstairs. To the right. The door is open. Did you leave word for Dr. Gibbs?"

It was: "Yes, Miss," and "Very good, Miss," and "Yes,

Miss." She felt in them what neither eyes nor words could tell her.

But the oldest of the four, who breathed heavily with his share of the burden, managed to gasp: "Never opened 'is eyes, Miss . . . after . . . I found 'e. . . ."

She brushed aside Mrs. Prickett's arms and entreaties, and followed the men upstairs. But, once there, she could not look—could not go near the bed until they had left her. She looked at them dumbly, as one by one they tiptoed out of the room. There was something she ought to say to them, but there were no words.

The old man picked up his shabby coat—he had need of it—and paused long enough to say in his whistling voice: "Doctor—'e'll be 'ere soon now, Miss." His heavy boots clumped slowly down the stairs after the others.

No, the Doctor would not be there soon. He would never be there again. He had nothing to do with that stillness on the bed. But he would not come again.

She listened until the men were out of the house; then softly closed the bedroom door.

Long after—a time unknown after—knocking somewhere . . . knocking at the door. . . . What could anybody want?

It ceased . . . came again. . . . Some one was speaking outside and turning the door-knob. . . . What could anybody want in that cold, cold room? It was so cold. . . . Who had opened the windows? . . . Knocking again. . . . Why didn't they come in? What were they waiting for?

"Come in," she called at last, thinking that was what they waited for.

But it seemed she had turned the key in the door; she did not know it, but she had turned the key.

So, then, she rose stiffly—being frozen so that she could hardly move—opened the door, and looked out with hostile eyes: "What do you want?"

It was Mrs. Prickett; and behind her were two other women, whispering at the head of the stairs.

"You must come down now, dearie," said Mrs. Prickett, in a hushed voice.

"Why?"

"You'll catch your death, sitting up here alone. . . ."

"Well, what of it?" That seemed to be the thing to say.

"But, my dear, ye can't stay there; there's—there's things to be done, and the young Doctor's waiting to see ye below."

"Oh, very well," said Olwen. "I'll come down."

Slowly she closed the door and passed the women, not knowing who they were, and went slowly down the stairway. The real world had gone; there was nothing left but a great space of shadowy, sliding screens that moved away and changed into others when one came near.

XII. MOTES

A MAN—yes, it was young Dr. Gibbs—turned from the window as she came in. He looked at her, hesitated, and forbore consolation. "I'll go up at once," was all he said. And she was aware of being grateful.

Mrs. Prickett came in and made her lie down—found a pillow and a blanket somewhere and tucked her in. Well, why not? There was nothing to be gained by sitting up—not now.

Once she reached out her hand for the old tweed great-coat; but it had been taken away.

Dr. Gibbs had come back. He drew up a chair, and looked at her in silence.

"Yes?" she roused herself to ask. "You may as well tell me."

"I think ye'll be glad to know," he said, with his heavy Northern burr. "It must have been instantaneous—a broken neck, you see. No lying there without help in the rain. . . ."

"I have been fearing that," she whispered. Tiny beads of sweat pricked out on her forehead. "I'm stifling," she said.

He moved the blanket a little. "Best keep it on awhile. I'm leaving some medicine for you, and I've told Mrs. Prickett. Ye'll take it when she brings it."

"Why?" she asked. "I'm not ill."

As he did not answer, she looked at him. A grim-faced young man with a heavy jaw and dull, kind eyes; one could trust him. When he did speak, he startled her into sharp attention: "I hope when my time comes I may be so lucky."

Lucky—to die of a broken neck? But he had more to say.

"It's not the dying, you know. It's what goes before sometimes—only sometimes. But it's a good thing to escape; and to have it happen when you've just come from saving life. . . ."

That reminded her. "Bill Chard?" she asked.

"He's gone. But Simmons got off with a double fracture of the leg; and White will pull through. Near suffocated he was; but your father got there in time. . . . The others weren't hurt much. He had 'em all patched up when he left. . . . Would go, they tell me, though they tried to keep him till morning."

"He was never afraid of anything," said Olwen proudly. "He went out in all weathers. . . ."

She remembered the clatter of hoofs that had broken into her vigil: "How about the child with the croup?"

There was a glimmer of a smile: "She'll weather it, poor little thing—worse luck!" And yet, thought Olwen, the father had ridden through the storm to fetch a doctor.

He seemed to be answering her question: "We're a stupid lot, the human race. Seems as if we might have learned to do better with ourselves by this time."

He sighed, as if he were somehow responsible, and walked away to the window.

What coarse, cheap boots he wore! she found herself thinking. There must be a reason, to be sure: there must be a reason for everything if one could but find it—even for a dear old obstinate father's . . . But this was no time to think —not yet. Besides, he was speaking again.

"Ye'll stay where you are today. See people if you want to—there'll be plenty coming. And take what Mrs. Prickett brings you to eat and drink. Mind you do that. And for tonight, I've left something to make you sleep."

"And after today?" There was a kind of feeble mockery in her tone.

"There'll be tomorrow, and we shall see about it when it comes. I'll look in. Ye've had a shock, you know."

It didn't seem worth while to reply. She looked at him in silence, as he stood knocking one ankle against the other, in a stupid, schoolboy fashion. "Ye've friends, you know. Remember that. We'll all stand by." And, awkwardly enough, he got himself out of the room.

But at the door she called him back: "There's Gwen, you know. She—"

He knew all about that, it seemed.

Well, she had done her part. She could close her eyes and keep everything . . . everything . . . outside. . . .

There was a change in the light. Yes, the sun had swung round to the window. It was shining on the rug, dulling the red of the fire somebody had made up. The sun would shine, of course, whenever he pleased; it was no business of his what had happened.

But, after all, it was but a narrow ray between the nearly drawn curtains. Whoever had made up the fire had not put back the curtains. Of course not. Somebody was dead in the house: you keep the curtains drawn. . . .

Motes, millions of motes, little sparkling worlds, each spinning on its own orbit, coming near and going away; just like the universes in the sky—no difference at all. They came deliberately swinging along, and winked at her—yes, winked —and swung away as deliberately. . . .

"I'll show you!" she thought, with a swift blind passion; and leaning on her hands she blew as a child might blow into the air.

Oh, the havoc! What had she done? The scurrying of things almost invisible, the wild crossing of orbits, the currents and counter-currents—whole universes upset by a childish whim.

Then slowly they settled back: the flurry was over. They came once more, deliberately swinging along, and winked at her—yes, winked—and swung away as deliberately. . . . One could do nothing with them. . . . And if they were peopled, like our world? like other worlds? like other universes? What did size matter—or life—or death—or anything?

And there came into her mind with the first loosening of tension a fragment of old talk with her father. There had been a circus over by Gloucester, and one of the wagons had upset through the loss of a wheel. For a day or two it was said that some of the animals had got away to the woods; but whether they were tigers or monkeys or prairie dogs, the reports varied. And hearing this talk, Olwen had run to her father, shivering: "I'm afraid! I'm afraid!"

"Tut, tut!" he had chidden. "There's nothing to be afraid of. There's only two things in the world; one's life and the other's death. And we don't know yet which is the best of 'em. And as for fear, you can't be afraid if you have your own soul. And it's all you have, mind you that now."

It was a strange way to talk to a child; and it was that kind of talk, now and then, that kept her thinking, no doubt.

"Couldn't you lose your soul—ever?" she had asked, awed. She was not thinking about sin and hell-fire; she had heard too little about them.

"I don't know," he had answered, in his considering way. "You might, perhaps. Best hang on tight."

Well, she could do that yet; she could do that. For all her wickedness, she had her soul yet, or she could not suffer. What happened to people who had lost their souls, he told her another time, was—they could not feel anything or care about anything. . . .

And now it seemed intolerable that she had been deceiving him and that she could never let him know. . . . They would say—the Vicar might say—he did know. . . . But that was

not to be thought about yet. It was enough to keep from thinking how she had deceived him and she had worried him; and now he would never know—what she would have died rather than tell him while he lived. . . .

It was better to think of the motes . . . so small . . . invisible except when the curtains were drawn close . . . and whirling along, moved by unknown forces, with an air of importance—quite as if they were little golden gods. . . .

Motes. . . .

XIII. COMFORT

THE Vicar came.

The plump, high-coloured dear—strange one had never noticed that before! Cheriton—his name should have been Cherub—the Reverend Percy Cherub. . . . No wonder Dad had always beaten him at whist. . . . And now he was coming with words of consolation. What did he know? That was the thing.

She half raised herself, with knitted brows. If only he would not sit down in Dad's chair! But he did—careful of his coat-tails—and his plump hands played with the knobs on the arms while he talked. And, after all, why not? Other people must sit in Dad's chair now. Why shouldn't he be the first? There was nothing to do about it.

"My dear child"—well, that was a good beginning—"I cannot tell you how shocked we were—are—Mrs. Cheriton and myself. . . ." Well, of course they were. Let them say it, then.

He talked on . . . on. . . .

One need not listen; one could watch the whirling motes.

And then, of course—it was his business to ask—there was the funeral. There had to be a funeral; and she must decide this and that. Of course, Mrs. Cheriton would be up a little later. . . . Oh, well, they could settle it among themselves.

Anything, of course, they could do—anything. . . .

"You are very kind," said Olwen.

Comfort—that was the very nature of comfort.

XIV. NO ANSWER

CAME the Vicar's wife—practical.

Of course, there was the question of mourning; but—"No!" cried Olwen. How he would have hated it!

"My dear"—always the prelude to something unpleasant. Well, let her argue, then. . . . Oh, well, if everybody expected it; pity to disappoint them. And he would not have to see it. . . . Anything—anything to stop the buzz. The woman clearly would not go till she had settled things to her liking. . . .

Relatives? To be sure, Dad had an only sister in London. She must be told; she would want to be at the funeral: she always went to funerals, and dragged Uncle Simon when she could. . . . Oh, well, let them. . . . Mrs. Cheriton would see to everything; leave it to her. So brisk, so efficient. To be sure, it was in a way part of her business; but she did it well; and knew she did it well. . . . Olwen wondered at the unkindness of her own thoughts.

All day long people were coming in and out, walking so quietly that one heard nothing but a succession of hushed voices.

So many things to be thought about! Who would have thought there were so many things to be thought about? Had it been so when her mother died? She could remember only seeing her in a long, strange box almost hidden under flowers, and being lifted up to kiss her forehead, and choking back a cry—because she knew she must make no noise—at

the damp iciness of her skin and a strange smell which was like nothing she had ever known. . . .

But of course there had been all this hushed activity to trouble her father; and now he was still—at the centre of it—and others were doing it for him.

It was the whole business of death from which the soul recoiled. What it meant—time for that later. Now it was the sordid business. . . .

The boy from the Vicarage with parcels and a box—mourning to try on. Mrs. Prickett undid the strings with fingers that trembled with eagerness—poor old soul!

Olwen would not look. They could decide these things themselves.

"But, dearie," said Mrs. Prickett, "you don't know as you can wear the frock; and you can't buy a 'at as you've never so much as set on your 'ead."

To be rid of her, Olwen took the hat and put it on.

"It do become ye." Mrs. Prickett could not control subdued admiration.

But Olwen was looking with hostile eyes at the pale girl who stared back at her from the glass.

"And 'ere be the gloves and the veil and the hankerchers," Mrs. Prickett went on, rustling tissue paper.

Veil? To hide one's weeping from the crowd, perhaps? But one would not weep. And handkerchiefs with wide borders of black. Only proper, of course. . . .

The shadowy screens that had become her world began to whirl into blackness. . . . There was a smell of lavender salts somewhere . . . nausea. . . .

And, after a long interval, smoking beef tea that she could not drink. . . .

Neighbours came; but she could not see them.

And flowers. They made her look at the cards. She was glad of that presently, for the names were so often of poor

people—people to whom he had been good, people you would not have thought. . . .

And by the night train there would be Uncle Simon and Aunt Victoria; and the whole story would have to be told. . . .

Near dusk they said Wagtail was at the door. She said let him come, and heard him clumping down the hall; it was better than their hushed tiptoeing.

He came up to the couch where she lay and looked down at her a moment in silence, cap in hand. He was holding a fragrant small bunch of herbs—marjoram and hyssop, lemon thyme, rosemary, and balm, held together and bound with sprays of ivy.

He had to clear his throat two or three times before he found words: "I says to myself, Miss, I says, when they told I, 'There's a good man gone,' I says to myself. And there woren't no blows but wore frost-killed; so I says mebbe they sweet-smelling plantses would do—'e wore always fond of they herbs. . . ."

For the first time her eyes were blinded and her throat was choked.

He stood looking at her, not knowing what more to say or to do.

She got to her feet. "I'll take them upstairs," she said; and Wagtail faded out on one of the vanishing screens.

The house seemed to be full of women. She knew vaguely who they were, but did not trouble to think why they were there. One of them tried to stop her, but was pushed away.

"I'm going upstairs," she said, "with these." She had the bunch of herbs.

And she was again in the icy room.

The curtains flapped a little in the breeze as she opened and shut the door. There was a smell of flowers—carnations, tuberoses, violets, roses—and through them all the strange,

penetrating, unmistakable smell associated with death in her childish memory.

She drew down the sheet.

A change since the morning. In the morning he had looked so incredibly young, for all his greying beard; now there were shadows, or perhaps it was the failing light. . . .

She laid one hand on his forehead. Nothing so cold in the world. But the hair—the soft hair that never would lie flat—unchanged. Only the hair unchanged. Would that go on for centuries? She had seen somewhere the braids of a Roman lady—reddish-brown, unchanged after nearly two thousand years. . . .

But this, lying on the bed—this was not her father. This was something as apart as the old tweed greatcoat on the rack downstairs. But whether he was gone away to some unimaginable world, or blown out like the light of a candle . . .

She laid the bunch of green things in his hand, with an odd flash of thought that it should have been the old pipe—that would have seemed more natural. For a moment she seemed to hear again the ugly scraping sound she used to run from when he was cleaning it out with his knife. . . . She would not be so bothered again.

She moved as if to draw up the sheet; but turned away and dropped into a chair and laid her face against the pillow on which his was laid. She could not leave him yet. And perhaps if she sat on there in the dusk, very still, and listened—not thought, but listened—something would tell her the meaning of it all, something would bring her peace. . . .

So she sat, and the dusk deepened into darkness.

So she sat, but there was only the silence.

So she sat, not thinking, but no voice spoke.

And at length the curtains flapped softly, like the flap of wings.

But it was only because some one had opened the door.

Those whispering women.

"I'm coming," she called. "I'm coming down in a moment."

She drew up the sheet.

She would not look upon him again. And from the stillness of death there had come no answer to the cry of her spirit.

XV. THE BUSINESS OF DEATH WAS OVER

AN ITALIAN sky—that was it; an Italian sky, the day of the funeral. At the doorway she had raised her eyes.

"Your veil, my dear," said her aunt's voice; and she had dropped the black thing, but only for the unendurable brightness.

So she walked among the shadowy screens which had become the world. Her uncle was ready with an arm, her aunt with a bottle of salts; she needed neither, with her head lifted proudly to the brilliant sky.

They were driving: the horses' hoofs went *clop-clop-clippety-clop* on the hard road, the brakes grating on the down hill.

The great square stone belfry, apart from its church, with the tall shingled spire sloping away to a mere point toward heaven—it seemed as new as if she had never seen it before. Perhaps she had always been too busy thinking, to look at it properly. There were rooks wheeling about it against the blue and settling with hoarse voices among the almost leafless oaks of the churchyard.

Past the clipped yew hedge, up the stone walk between the flat gravestones of ancestors—her ancestors, his ancestors, Anthony Kingsland's ancestors. Why should he cross her mind now? And why the sudden stab of pain that made her stumble and catch at her uncle's arm?

They passed slowly into the wide, cold church after the flower-covered coffin. There seemed to be many people—many

people; but they were not living—were all somewhere back on the shadowy screens.

And then the service for the dead. The rosy-cheeked Vicar reading it as he had read it hundreds of times before, mindful of his intonations—surely he was mindful of his intonations. . . . Did he believe those words? Did any one believe those words? Did any one hear them, even? Made by some old ancestor in a ruff, like the ancestors under the flat stones—no, older, grimmer, knowing all that men needed to know because God somehow had told him. . . . Words . . . chanting . . . words . . . singing . . . words. . . .

They were moving out into the churchyard.

An Italian sky—the sky they would have seen if . . . And the rooks wheeling in a wide company, like the shadow of a great black wing, before they settled, with many hoarse voices, among the bare branches of the oaks.

One went through things like this by not living, by the suspension of life, by mere breathing and watching what was going on round about—that had nothing to do with one's self . . . shadowy screens, and overhead the black wing of the rooks. It might be painted as the shadow of death. . . .

Was that small sound Aunt Victoria sniffing into her handkerchief?

Her only brother; they must have been children together. . . .

The first spadeful of earth. But what did it matter? He had gone away, long before that. He had nothing to do with the flowers and the clods they were throwing into hollowed earth.

People were moving now.

Somebody's arm was round her; somebody was sobbing; not she.

"There, there," she said, not knowing to whom.

The horses' hoofs again—*clop-clop-clippety-clop*—and the grating of the brakes on the down hill.

The door wide open to a house strangely empty—was it of flowers?

In the library a high fire, and some woman bringing a tea-tray before they had taken off their wraps.

Everything would be going on as usual, now they had got rid of . . . She drove away the thought.

But her uncle was rubbing his hands before the blaze; her aunt was folding black glacé kid gloves. Impossible to avoid seeing they were relieved; besides, she was relieved herself.

The business of death was over.

XVI. OH, GREGORY, SAVE THE KITTENS: THE CAT NEEDS THEM

"AND now," said her Aunt Victoria, "what are you going to do?" As she spoke, she rose from the breakfast table and, walking stiffly across the room, stooped to pick up a stray thread from the rug.

"Now," said Olwen to her own mind, "I know why I have always disliked her: it's the way she walks, with those slim, long feet in tight-laced high boots, turned out too far. I shall not go to live with her."

It was a silly and a wicked thought, she admitted; but she could almost have laughed for its truth.

"Do?" she repeated. "Live on here, I suppose. What else is there?"

Her Uncle Simon turned over a page of *The Times;* he was always a bit impatient with women—even, or especially, with his wife. But on her his mood had no effect; she overrode it calmly.

"You can't possibly do that," said her aunt.

How could she have been Dad's sister? What had life done to her to make her like this?

"Why not?" was the obvious retort.

"Alone?" was equally obvious, as the source of the difficulty.

"I'll get a maid. Perhaps I shall have Gwen back."

Somehow among the sliding screens of unreality, fading now into daylight, she had got the impression that Gwen had

been sent home to her mother. But she might come back, now that she had lost her man. And, after all, one was used to her; she was a bit of the old; she was something to hold on to against new and troubling plans, whatever they might be.

"Why don't you come back with us for a bit?" asked her uncle.

She looked at him. A kindly man; oh, yes, a kindly man. In tea. And well-to-do. What did one do in tea? Import it? Did he know about ships, or did he only sit in a stuffy office somewhere and have his lunch sent in, a chop and ale? He looked as if it would be a chop and ale. Somehow she must have been told such things about him; she was trying to remember.

"Well?" he frowned. "Are you wool-gathering?"

"Baa, baa, black sheep." But he was ruddy and grey-haired. "I beg your pardon, Uncle Simon."

"You'd better come and stop with us a bit," he repeated.

"In London?" She was incredulous. "What to do?"

"My dear child," said her aunt, peering at an imaginary spot on her black skirt.

Olwen's tone grew defiant: "Well, what should I? What did I say that was wrong? I'd rather stay—home—if you don't mind."

"But you're only a young girl . . ."

"Almost twenty-six," said Olwen.

"You should have somebody with you."

Then Olwen laughed: "That must have been in Mrs. Cheriton's mind when she urged me to come to the Vicarage for a time." She suppressed a violent "Good Lord!" and added: "It's very kind of you all; but I've got to be alone—and I'm going to!"

Followed a long argument, with Uncle Simon rustling his paper at intervals; but at the end, Olwen, who had delib-

erately shut her ears, only repeated obstinately: "I'm over age; and you can't make me. I shall stay here."

"People will talk"—as if it were being said for the first time.

"Let them. They will talk about something. Why not about me? They're welcome." She was angry now; and the very anger sent the red blood coursing through her veins as it had not done for days. "I can take care of myself," she said. "And there's no question of money. Dad . . ." But at that she had to go upstairs; for she could not let them see her break.

She had to put up with them for several days. There was the will to be found and read; there were bills to be paid; there was bank and other business to be settled. Her uncle was a man of affairs, and she was glad to put the load on him.

They came back at her in many different ways; they were trying to do their duty by her.

But at last it was her uncle who stopped the badgering: "Let the girl be. She knows her own mind. And she'll be marrying one of these days."

"No." She shook her head; then wished she had kept silence.

"It would be the best thing possible," said her aunt; "the only thing for a girl like you."

Olwen bit her lips. If she kept still now, they would go soon.

"No lack of young men since the War, I suppose?" Her uncle attempted a joke.

"Plenty," she said. Her nimble mind flew of itself to the brass tablet in the church where Reuben Wagtail's name stood among others. It was a long list for so small a place. "Plenty," she said. "And there's Mrs. Cheriton . . ."

She did not bother to say how Mrs. Cheriton came in; she fancied—and correctly—that the mere mention of her name would give some assurance.

And at last they drove away in a cab, and the house was clear of them. Mrs. Prickett was gone; the whispering women were gone; everybody was gone. No, there was Gwen in the kitchen, rattling the tea-things. How and when she had come back Olwen did not know; she had not seen her until she had brought in the tray that afternoon.

There was still Gwen to be reckoned with; best to get it over. She rang.

Gwen came promptly, in her black dress, with a neat cap on her black curly hair; but her white cuffs were off and her sleeves rolled up, and she wore a coarse apron for washing up the tea-things. By the side of her mouth there was a muffin crumb.

They looked at each other. Olwen was wondering: Was she that wild creature—that? But on Gwen's calm, stolid face there was no sign of such a memory.

"Have you come back to stay with me, Gwen?"

"If you'd like me to, Miss. I thought I'd come and see . . ."

Olwen hesitated. She was trying to overcome a sense of repulsion—of faint nausea, even. She knew, of course, that such things happened every day, happened in Lydwell often enough to keep the gossips busy; yet in her own house—in Dad's house. And the thing might happen again.

"I don't know," she said slowly. "I might be going away—some time." Was it Italy she had in mind? She was not aware of it. "Some time. What should you do then? Had you thought of that?"

"No'm," said Gwen demurely. Evidently she was not troubled.

Then Olwen made up her mind. Certainly Gwen would be no better off, turned loose now; and they knew each other's ways; and she was a link; and perhaps one could keep her straight. And, after all, how throw stones . . . ?

"I think," she said, "you might stay on for a time. I'm not going yet."

"Thankee'm," said Gwen, without enthusiasm.

Was she still mourning for Bill Chard, with that piece of buttery muffin by her mouth? One might break one's heart, perhaps, and still eat muffins with gusto—especially if one were Gwen. . . . Oh, no, no! one must not think such things.

She returned to the book she was not reading. What was it, anyway? An old volume of some learned society which Dad had picked up in an odd lot at an auction; he was always bringing such things home. *The Baynes Letters,* 1563-67, edited by . . . No matter. And who were the Bayneses, that their letters should have been edited by no-matter-who, and published by a learned society? She opened at random, and tried to fix her attention on the printed words. But in a moment she had dropped the book. Here was a thing now to keep the world in mind of. Poor Elizabeth Baynes, with her misspelled indignation, writing to her husband how the brindled cat had kittened and Gregory had misunderstood and had "drownded" them all so the poor beast was dragging herself about with a great crying which did put Elizabeth in mind of her own sweet brat dying not a day old and herself with the pains in her breasts like to . . .

Oh, why not let the poor woman be, after all these centuries—her and her brindled cat! They had somehow lived it through, and Gregory and the husband; and they were all dead now—dead as the kittens of the brindled cat. . . . Everything went into the past, and little the difference made by the time of its going.

There was a thought—she had a sudden absurd memory of Mrs. Prickett: "There's something on me mind, Miss, if I could but put my finger on it"—there was a thought, but it would not out. So read on about the Bayneses and see what

they have to say for themselves besides wailing about Gregory, who "drownded" all the kittens of the brindled cat. . . . Did, for example, the husband write words of comfort? Did husbands—so long ago?

No. He answered right enough, within the week—which was soon for a man a two days' journey away in London. No. He answered, and to the point—his point. Not a word about the kittens; he had his own fish to fry:

"Sweetheart," he said, "on recepte of this send Gregory forthwith to me with my russet sute, for I am like to need it, and a jar of your consarve which doth ever mend my cough, and bid Thomas Bone set out the new strawberries better than he did those last yere, and look that Watkins begins to mend the pinfold against my homecoming. . . ." And so on for two pages, ending her "true husband." Oh, a practical man, this Baynes—not unlike young Gibbs perhaps, who came from that district. Well . . .

What next, then? Something, of course. The things of life might be pitifully small, but, love them or hate them, they went on.

In the back of the fire where the big log had fallen apart there was a cliff or promontory, and on it a Lilliputian of a man: a little gallant figure with a profile as clear, so like—so very like that her heart was in her mouth—Anthony Kingsland laughing at her in her sorrow. He would never do so—never do so! She was all a protest and a cry. But the small, far-away figure on the log went on laughing—she had seen him laugh so—until she pushed the fragments of the log farther apart and he fell into the red furnace below.

It was a horrible penance, that the most casual things of life could so stir old memories of past sorrow, could so mock at old pains, could so wring the heart with imaginations that were false. . . .

Was this the lurking thought? Why, then, a bag for imagination, and drown it as Gregory had drowned the kittens; and at last one would have peace.

Not peace, no. Peace at the end, perhaps. Living now—the coming out into sunlight of all that was hidden within—growing. That was the thing. And how could one grow among the toys of day-by-day? How could one live in the upper layers of consciousness—custom, habit, clothes, muffins, tea? Growing was a deep thing; it went down to the roots. How could one learn to live from the roots? Oh, Gregory, save the kittens; the cat needs them!

XVII. THE GARDEN GOES ON

WAGTAIL was transplanting daffodils, breaking up the great brown clumps, rebedding some of them, moving some of them and setting them under the kitchen window.

"Why there?" asked Olwen.

"The Doctor, 'e—" He stopped and looked at her.

"He what?" she asked.

". . . 'e said it wore a dull spot yander. We must brighten it h'up; that's what 'e said, Miss."

"When?"

Wagtail reflected: "One day last week it wore—Wednesday."

Not a week, then; not a week ago he had been alive and planning the garden for next spring. . . . The mind ran back and rested a moment there. If one could stay—stay in last Wednesday. . . . So few days between then and this hopeless now. . . . Everywhere about the house and garden, signs and tokens of him. . . . The old pipe on the library mantelpiece. No one had touched it yet. It had seemed as if he might suddenly come into the room and look for it, and, not finding it, begin to swear and fumble in the old good-natured way until she showed him where it was. . . . Some day Gwen would put it in its place in the rack; and that link would be gone.

And now the daffodils. He had told Wagtail what to do, and the work was going on. In the spring there would be

more daffodils—more and more, every spring that was to follow. Life could not be stopped from going on.

Well, the garden should go on. After all its desolation it should be more beautiful than ever before. There were people who said that the souls of the dead could come back; and some said that inexplicably, in the far-away country where they were, they could see what was on earth. . . . However that might be, if he was anywhere—and there was a chance; oh, at least, a chance—he would be cut to the heart to know that his garden was not cared for as he had loved it. The work must go on. It should be his memorial—much more his than the granite pyramid chosen by her uncle and aunt, which Chagworthy was perhaps cutting even now.

"Give me a trowel," she said. "I'm going to work with you."

"It's all a muck, Miss," he protested.

But she did not care for that. She picked up a large clump of the fat brown things, blatantly alive even in their winter sleep, too strong almost to be broken by her hands. She parted them at last, and re-set them in the crumbling, red-black earth, with which she blanketed them closely against the frosts to come.

"Mind your 'ands, Miss," said Wagtail. He brought her a bit of canvas to kneel on.

"Why?" she said, looking at them and brushing off the loose earth that left its stain behind. "They're all the same, you know. It's what we're made of, isn't it?"

He ventured a grin: "Men-folks, it do say in the Bible; but women-folks is made of Adam's spare-rib—too white and clean to touch muck."

"But Adam's rib, what was that made of?" she countered, and never knew what he answered or whether he answered.

With a sudden sickening flash she seemed to see what was going on in her father's grave. In a few years it would be flat,

like her mother's, which could not be found now but by the stones that marked it. That was what was going on: earth to earth; not words, but true.

And these hands of hers, alive and wonderful, able to move themselves, able to move all sorts of things—shapely hands with long, slim white fingers, with nails and dimples; beautiful hands, she had been told so more than once; hands that could write and sew and make music; hands that had been kissed, that could cling in love—they were no more than the crumbling earth in which the daffodil bulbs were settling. They came and went—hands and bodies and daffodils—came in their various and splendid forms of beauty, and went back to the earth. . . . There was something—something. . . . Kneeling there on the rough brown canvas, with the chill of the earth coming up through it she felt—for a moment she felt—the invisible Presence in which all things move and have their being; but with her small mind she could not see, with her pitiably small mind she could not see. . . .

XVIII. OLD AGE WOULD BE THE CURE

ONE evening, between tea and supper, Gwen showed Dr. Gibbs into the library.

He bungled in after her, his face redder than usual—but there was a sharp wind that night—and rubbed his hands before the fire with seeming briskness. No, nervousness, that was it.

He had smartened up his clothes; they attracted attention; and his tie was—well, such a tie as he would have chosen, Olwen thought, more idly than kindly. She looked at his boots: they had a smart polish; but they were—were—what was the word?—oh, plebeian. She was reading Plutarch, as it happened.

He began with her health, of course; but his visit was clearly not professional. And he could not seem to come to the point. She tried at last to help him.

"I suppose," she said, "most of my father's patients are going to you now."

"That's it," he said eagerly. "That's what I've come about."

She touched the fire and made a wide yellow blaze: "Yes?"

"The point is—the point is—I expected—when he retired, you know, when he retired—to buy his goodwill. . . ."

"Oh?"

"But we had—in fact, we had spoken of the matter, once or twice, not long ago. He was thinking of. . . ."

"But you'll get his patients anyway," said Olwen. "There's no one else to speak of within five miles. Of course. Why

bother?" Her tone was a little impatient. What was the stupid fellow getting at?

"But the point is—the point is"—He was like a puppy from whom one was trying to take a cap or a shoe—"the point is"—he shook his head with each phrase, in his intense earnestness—"he had suggested taking me into partnership, now, at once. I ought to pay. . . ."

"I don't see why you are telling me this," she said, seeing that he waited for her comment.

"Why, because I've got two hundred pounds saved up"—something of ancestral coarseness showed now in his tone. It would hurt to give up that hard-saved two hundred pounds; and yet he was bent upon doing it—"and I've got all the practice now."

"Why pay for what you can have for nothing?" she asked, with a trace of mockery. It crossed her mind: "That's not good Lancashire."

"I've been thinking about it a lot," he went on doggedly, "and you'll excuse me, but I know what I'm talking about. I'm a poor man; I've worked my way to where I am—you needn't be told that—and I've a mother and two sisters in Crewe. . . ."

He stopped, realizing too late, she saw, that it was not the time to say he contributed to their keeping.

"I know what I'm talking about," he repeated. "And I'll pay something for the practice."

"You'll do no such thing!" she said lightly, but still with a sudden pricking of heat. There was a nobility about the man.

He did not know how to come back at her—mumbled about his conscience. His purpose held; yet the money was dear.

"For one thing, I don't need it," she went on. "There's insurance, and we'd sold some land. I've enough. Perhaps it would be better if I hadn't. Then I'd go to work."

"Oh, no," he said, "not you!" There was that in his tone and his eyes which made her turn away with the hot discomfort of blushing.

"You think I couldn't?" she said defiantly. "I could find something; I could learn to type."

His answer was unexpected: "My sister is a typist—one of them. The other has a bad spine. But she helps as she can: numbers pages, and reads for mistakes, and that. They work together."

"If you paid me what you don't owe," said Olwen softly, "you would be robbing the widow and orphan. If you keep the money, I should think—I should think you could soon have them all here with you, if you liked."

"That I couldn't," he retorted. "Not while my mother's alive. She couldn't be uprooted, not she. Her old home and friends and Chapel—not she. It was a venture, my coming down here six years ago. They wanted me to try it in Crewe. But not me. They knew me there as a—poor kid, in the streets."

He stopped talking, flustered; and there was a silence.

He rose to his feet, thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets, and began to move about the room, stumbling once over a footstool. She could not avoid looking at his boots—his shiny, clumsy, pug-nosed boots.

He stopped before her, his voice husky: "I don't know"—he had to clear his throat—"I don't know why it is I can't talk to you plain and say what I mean."

"You were plain enough," said Olwen; and added: "Only wrong."

"You don't know"—it was almost a groan—"you don't know."

"Maybe not," she said drily; "but I know my own mind. Suppose you let me talk a moment."

He slumped heavily into a chair, but did not withdraw his hands from his pockets.

"I've been thinking too. You know, there's a lot of things useless to me in the surgery; my father kept buying new things from London—instruments and all that. I don't know what . . ."

"I'll buy them," Gibbs interrupted, his forehead pricking with sudden sweat in the firelight.

"You'll not," said Olwen, "for I'll not sell them. But I want you to take them—not for yourself, you know; but so that you can. . . . Well, the neighbourhood may as well have the use of them. That's what was in my mind, I suppose."

"And you won't take any money for them?" he demanded, with a spark in his dense brown eyes. The sweat was still on his forehead; she wished he would wipe it away.

She shook her head.

He got up again with a stifled—it could not have been "Darn you!" she thought; but that was what her ear seemed to catch.

He rose and paced the floor in silence. Then: "What am I to say to you?"

"Nothing. Come tomorrow and take whatever would be useful. That's all there is to it."

He looked down at her, helpless; but his next words were electrifying: "I suppose it comes of being born and bred a lady for generations."

She sat up, startled: "What does?"

"Being able to handle a poor chap like me like you do."

"Oh, as for that, I've not. . . ." But she knew she had; and she knew also that there had been pleasure in the doing.

"You see . . ." He was indicating that he knew she could not honestly contradict him. "But"—passion thickened his voice—"you knew I came here bent on not going away till you had agreed to take that money."

She flashed upon him: "And you knew I wouldn't!"

"How did I know"—anger had lapsed into sullenness—"what a lady like you would do?"

Ancestry coming out in the stress of emotion? Who would have expected this kind of talk from him?

"Well, let's make it up then," she said, weary of his emotion and thinking only of getting rid of him.

He whirled on his heel and stood frozen: "What?"

Then she remembered an interpretation for her words which had not crossed her mind when she spoke them—so far had she been from his mood. She hastened to cover up the slip: "I mean, there are no bones broken. There's no hard feeling, is there? You take the things; and let's be friends."

"I can't—that," he said slowly.

"Then I shall have packed up what I think might be useful and send them down some day." She purposely misunderstood.

He looked down at her again, bending a little, with one hand on the arm of her chair: a thick red hand with stumpy fingers, but nails immaculate.

"You know very well what's in my mind," he said grimly.

"And if I do?" Olwen looked up and challenged him.

His hand dropped and he moved away. "It's no good saying it, then."

"No," she said, and held back a conventional "I'm sorry."

He stood, clenching and unclenching his fingers: "I'd best be going now. I knew as much."

A kind of desperate pity ran through Olwen—a pity not only for him.

"You don't know; you don't understand. That's the worst of it. If you were the groom at the 'Bird in Hand' . . . no matter what you were . . . if I . . . But I can't make myself. . . ."

"No," he said, "you can't," and looked about to see where he had left his hat.

He found it and came back: "I'd no business to be bothering you just now; but you see I was thinking . . ."

Thinking about her forlorn state, of course.

She looked up, wishing she could think of some kind thing to say; and to her surprise, her eyes filled, and she had to bite the trembling of her lips.

"Don't you worry," he said roughly. "It's nothing to do with you. I'll be off. Don't stop the tonic yet; I'll send along another bottle."

So that was the end of that; but no, not quite. He had come back from the door:

"There's another thing . . . perhaps you don't know. . . ." No, he could not get further that way. The words came with a rush: "I could be good to a woman. I could make the way easy for her."

So he could. So he would. And there was no one else to do it.

She stared into the fire. But was it so hard now? How was it hard? It was easy compared with the way of most women —too easy. There was the trouble, perhaps. If he had said now, "I could—I could. . . ." Good Lord! was she on the point of telling the man it was children she wanted more than anything else in the world? She had not known it before, she had not known it herself; and here she was on the point of saying it; and if he knew that, she could never be rid of him in the world.

She stared into the fire; and he, looking at her, guessed nothing of the swift havoc in her mind.

Once she half turned to him, half turned her face as if to speak; and if he had taken her then, taken her without a word. But he was the son of a Crewe shopkeeper, and had no courage for that. And so he lost.

When the outer door swung shut she trembled as if she had escaped some peril. And then she could have wept for shame. That life had caught her so—caught her when she was least thinking. She might have sold all the years to come. And for what? For the love of a stupid good man who would work himself to death to give her comforts and spoil her with his worship. For a pack of brats. She stopped in a sort of terror. Was it ancestry crowding through? How did she come to know such words? Had she heard them on the village street? Oh, Elizabeth Baynes, of course. . . .

Children! One knew women were said always to want children; one had sneered at it more than once, riding with Dad through the green forest.

"I don't know, Sister," he had shaken his head. "You'll be old some day, though you can't imagine it now."

"And what's that got to do with it?" she had demanded.

"It's the way you're made, I suppose," he had said. "Don't kill me with your basilisk stare. I didn't make you of Adam's rib. I'd have made you of sugar-candy and stars if I'd been doing it. . . . But made as you are, my dear, they do say—I don't know anything about it, being a man—that no woman ever—how shall I put it? Well, you see, we men have got our work; we put ourselves out on the world in our work, whether it's by head or by hands; that's what might be called living, I suppose. But with women . . ."

"Having no heads and no hands but for house drudgery—" she had jeered.

"I wouldn't say that," he had remonstrated very gently. "But when a body's made for a particular use—no matter how it got so—it almost looks to me as if it would have to be used in that way if there's to come anything like living. . . ."

She had found her answer by the roadside and pointed to it: "Like that?"

A smutty-faced woman had just come out of a cottage, a tag of loose hair tumbling from her untidy knot, her apron filthier than her torn cotton dress. In one hand she carried a pail of dirty water; in the other arm a puling child with mucus running from its nose into its mouth. She poured the water into the ditch, set down the pail, and swooped in her half-laced, muddy boots upon a little boy pretending to fish in the ditch water. He dropped his reed and broke into a wail, cowering as much from her shrill scolding as from the sharp blows on his ears, and the puling baby wailed with him.

"Children!" Olwen had said; but her father: "Poor things!"

He had pulled up and called: "Hey, Sal!" and the woman scowled over her shoulder. "Let's have a look at the kid."

She brought the baby, wiping its nose on her apron. He promised medicine.

"Fortunately," he had said as they rode on, "it's likely to die young. And the little lad will soon be able to fend for himself. But you're confusing A with B. You know about Sal, don't you?"

"I know she's a War widow," she had answered.

"You may as well know more," he had said. "Down in the village they say of her, 'She's not very particular.' Do you know what that means? What could such a woman do with children?"

"They're all dirty little things." She had not given up her point.

"Well, it's a good job making them grow up clean—body and soul, I mean—eh? A woman might think she'd accomplished something, eh?"

"And you think that's why women want them?" She was still scornful—how well she remembered!

"Not at all. But I think you'll have to live longer before

you find out why. So I'll not try to tell you," he had said. And this had happened not so many months ago.

Had she lived since then? She had not found out anything except that the body can make a sudden tumult and almost—almost turn one the wrong way for the rest of life.

But the danger was past now; and old age would be the cure. Old age should find her sitting alone by her fireside. . . .

XIX. THE WAY FOOLISH PEOPLE TURNED UP

WHITE-HOT, the sun of Italy. Who would have thought it could be so hot? It made one's head ache and blistered the soles of one's feet walking on the great flat stones of the Square.

Crowds of people and dust. There would be a procession going to the black-and-white church yonder . . . and there it was, quite close—so close that she could have touched the surplices with her hand. . . . Astonishingly like those of the choristers in the church at home, they were. Yes, but the faces were different—different, yet oddly familiar. They moved very slowly, hanging each foot in turn in the air before setting it down, and their faces were . . .

"But they're all Dante!" she cried.

"Of course. Who did you think they were?" said a familiar man's voice at her elbow. She turned. There was Jack Winter in khaki, with tin helmet and gun. But how did he get to Italy from the Rhine? He was more freckled than she remembered; and as he grinned, his teeth showed—oh, foxy!

He shifted his gun a little: "Shall I shoot them for you?"

"Who?" she asked, shrinking: she was afraid of that gun.

"The Dantes."

"What for?" It seemed odd, of course; but you couldn't tell what would happen in Italy.

"For their ugly mugs," said Jack, doing something to his gun.

She grabbed his arm: "Oh, don't! They wouldn't like it."

"Who wouldn't?" He was fierce.

"The people of Italy."

He jogged her rudely: "Don't spoil sport."

"But I shouldn't like it."

"That's another thing," said Jack. And that was the last she saw of the gun.

The procession went on. How could she have thought they wore surplices? Togas they were—Roman togas. And there was Julius Caesar, and Cicero, and Virgil—just like the pictures of their statues—and rows and rows of solemn, high-nosed faces. Who were they all?

With a sudden whoop Jack bowled over a whole row of senators; they fell like ninepins. In fact he was playing ninepins. But the next rows, coming on behind, glared terribly. He caught her hand: "We must cut and run!"

They ran so that the houses streamed past, he tugging her by the hand and she with her feet like lead, scarcely moving —yet the houses streamed past. . . . Everything grew dark—lights and great clanging—the railway station—there stood the train for England, with the doors being banged by the guard. But the last door still swung wide.

"Come on!" shouted Jack. "We shall make it!"

Between them stood a Madonna with a sky-blue cloth on her head, carrying a tray. "Tea, Miss?" she asked.

Jack's grip fell away. She could see him catch the swinging door as the train began to move. She was alone in a strange land. She could not move; she tried to scream "Jack!" but no sound came.

"Your tea, Miss," said the Madonna urgently.

The darkness faded into grey clouds; but the tray remained, and on it a cup of tea. It was no Madonna, but Gwen who was offering it.

It was something to be safe at home, she thought, even on a dead, grey November morning.

She shivered a little, remembering her dream; and then she began to wonder about Jack Winter. She had not thought about him for many months. Was he still on the Rhine?

Tea finished, there was the day before her, to be got through somehow: like yesterday and the day before, and a long line of days stretching back to the time before; like tomorrow and the day after, and a long line of days stretching forward to . . .

Meanwhile, there was the bath, and dressing, and breakfast with the paper—letters, perhaps; but not any that she would want.

Yet she could never control a certain eagerness in turning over the envelopes by her plate. There could not possibly be a letter from Anthony Kingsland. Why should he write? And if he wrote, what could follow? There could be no letter from him except by miracle. Yet there had been miracles, so the Bible said; and even today there were things as strange as miracles. Knowing the complete unreason of her foolish hope—if it could be called hope—still she looked. And still, as this morning, she had nothing but bills, advertisements, requests for subscriptions, announcements; yes—what had not happened before for a long time—a stiffly affectionate note from Aunt Victoria. Any time she thought she'd like a change . . . and so on.

Olwen meditated on it. If she went to London? To Italy, perhaps? No, her dream was enough to scare her from that.

After breakfast she told Gwen what she would have for luncheon, for dinner, suggested the polishing of the silver and more attention to the ferns; and was ready for the empty day.

Lord knows, she tried to fill it.

First, there was the piano. Like most girls who think they love music, she had not loved the practising; but she had somehow scrambled through enough of lessons and finger

exercises to play such old-fashioned music as her father liked to hear. Modern things he would not listen to; but Mozart, Haydn, Scarlatti, Bach, and still older masters would content him by the hour. Beethoven he stormed against—said the man didn't know a good air when he found it, but drove it away with ear-splitting discords.

Now that he was gone, she felt somehow bound to practise more the old things he had loved. Perhaps it was with a subconscious desire to expiate past neglect; more likely it was because it was something definite to wear away the morning with.

Afterwards, when she was weary and her fingers slipped, she made up the fire, went about to see whether Gwen had picked the dead leaves from the plants—as, of course, she had not—there was always a little tidying to do, and usually some mending. She hated darning; but of late she had been rummaging in the linen closet, and had brought out old fine napery worn thin here and there, but to be saved by skilful stitches. It had not been used for many years; the Doctor had given up dinner-parties long since, but her mother, Olwen had heard him say, could never be long content without going to or giving them. And now Olwen was darning all the best linen, quite as if it might be needed again some day; but in her own mind she dimly knew that it was like the tasks the wicked fairy used to set poor girls in the tales—they worked and worked, but it was never done. And she was glad for that. If this was all there was to life, at least it was better than looking about in a panic for a way to earn a living.

The luncheon gong—a pleasant set of bells from Burma. On the table a tiny bunch of primroses—Wagtail must have found them under the hedges forgetful of winter. And there were mushrooms on toast—Wagtail again: he gathered some in the fields almost every day—and young celery; grapes—from the Vicarage, no doubt: they were always sending. And

Gwen had made the silver shine; and the darn in the lunch cloth, now first laundered, was a masterpiece. Should not one say grace for all this and be thankful?

Needlework? Could she perhaps learn to do needlework really well, make an art of it? But why? She had money enough to live on. What should she do with more? The papers said there were workless men and starving babies in London; but what could she do about that? There were hardly any poor in Lydwell.

After luncheon the nap Dr. Gibbs had prescribed. It was hard at first; but now nothing easier.

After the nap a walk—to the village usually. The forest paths were wet, and it was not the forest she was needing now, but firelight on the windows and friendly faces and laughter round the lamp.

The Vicarage—she was always having to go there to thank them for something: they were so very kind. No doubt they had told Uncle and Aunt they would be. And she knew she was welcome. When the older people were out she could run up to the nursery and have tea with Simmy and Alice, the cherubs! No, he was a cherub, if you like; but she, a small grave imp who led him by the nose. Their father and mother over again, life repeating itself on and on. To what end? And Simmy would be a vicar in his turn and have children —more vicars and vicars' wives. Oh, good people, good people, moving on and on, like the choristers in the church, like the senators in the dream—where? Meantime, Simmy and Alice would settle upon her for stories—"The Man Who Wouldn't Say Boh," or "The Long, Lone Road to Scalawag," or "Bonamy the Bobtail. . . ."

"Tell it again," they would insist, correcting her if she strayed from the formula.

And when she had concluded, "Tell it again," until she fled. It argued a certain lack of imagination.

No, she would not go to the Vicarage today.

She might go to Mrs. Clay's, where there were always echoes of the world, even of the high life whose muniment boxes Clay handled. There were always the latest fashion papers, and often a frock or some other new thing from London; sometimes a box of books from Mudie's with the latest novels. There would be other women dropping in, and gossip and most excellent tea cakes. . . .

No, she would not go to Myrtle Bank today.

At Mrs. Holloway's gate she hesitated. No, Mrs. Holloway had learned bridge whist when she was last in town; they would be playing. . . . She passed on.

Mrs. Dale, then. She stopped. But Mrs. Dale was not at home: with the bridge-players, perhaps.

So Olwen bought some stamps and some linen thread for her darning and a new toasting-fork for Gwen and was on the homeward way when she met Susan Willey and Gladys Moore coming out of the schoolhouse gate.

"Caught, Mouse!" said Miss Willey, with the vivacity which had become second nature. "Now you'll come home to tea with us. We shan't be a minute. Dear, if you would stop for some cakes and scones . . . ?"

"Yes, dear," said Gladys Moore, and tripped—that was the word, Olwen thought—to the baker's.

A strangely-assorted pair, she thought, looking at Miss Willey with the new eyes which she seemed to have found lately. Would Dad have said she was growing?

Well, look at Susan Willey, then. Schoolmistress printed all over her, from the neat high knot of scanty, greying, blonde hair, to the pale eyes always restlessly alert to see whether Bessie was doing—what she usually was, no doubt; to the high-bridged nose which held glasses so well; to the narrow mouth which had so long ago shut away everything that must not be said before children; to the flat, thin figure—

down to the broad-toed, almost heelless boots. She was born to be a schoolmistress, and she had fulfilled her destiny.

But not so Gladys Moore—round-faced, red-faced, curly-haired, boyish Gladys Moore, determinedly youthful. How had she escaped being a farmer's wife?

Here she was, breathless—she had been running with her bags—and the kettle not on; and Susan Willey barely changing her boots for badly-scuffed slippers.

"I never feel at home till I've put on my slippers," she said plaintively.

"Never mind, dear. I'll fill the kettle," said Gladys Moore, and bustled about among cups and saucers.

There was more flurry than speed. It was clear they were upset by the unexpected visitor. It was a succession of flutters—hands and feet and voices, running in and out of bedrooms and the common sitting-room.

"Where did you put the . . . ?"

"Let me, dear."

"No, I'll—you go and sit down. . . ."

Olwen found herself looking about the room: yellow wall-paper with urns of shaded pink; and they had tried to improve things with innumerable small photographs from abroad—oh, they had travelled together, more than once. Here was Venice in colours, three prints in a silver frame; here was a climbing party in the Alps, Miss Willey recognizable with a short skirt and an Alpenstock—that was made with Gladys Moore's new camera; the Sistine Madonna in brown; other madonnas, Crucifixions, religious scenes in shiny photographs, fast fading—a blur of cheap mementoes.

They came back with the tea made; but they could not find the toasting-fork. Their landlady must have . . .

"Here's my new one," said Olwen. "Lucky!"

With a flutter of "I'll wash it"—"No, I'll—you sit down," tea was ready at last, and Olwen toasted the scones and tried

to feel at home. There was in the back of her mind some reason for coming, she knew; but that was for later.

Into the flutter of hands and skirts and the aimless bustle of high voices, she flung a blunt question: "Do you never get tired of teaching, Miss Willey?"

"My dear!" As if the question were unpardonable.

"But don't you?" Olwen persisted.

To her amazement, Miss Willey bit in her lips until they disappeared, and blinked rapidly; and in a moment was fumbling in her pocket for her handkerchief to wipe her glasses.

"Take mine, dearest," said Miss Moore.

By that time Olwen had burned her scone. "You'd better take the fork," she said to Gladys Moore. "I've something on my mind."

"My dear," said Miss Willey, trying to control a trembling voice. "I've only two years more of it before I retire—only two. And it's my life."

It was her life. So much as that, thought Olwen. She said: "Did you always feel that way about it?"

"Always!" said Miss Willey. "Do drink your tea before it's cold. I've known nothing else. Gladys, darling, isn't that scone ready?"

"I burnt my scone," said Olwen. "I'll have a cake, please. I've been wondering. Do you suppose I'd like to teach?"

They both stared.

"I mean it," she insisted.

"What for?" asked Gladys Moore, in a harsh voice. "You don't have to."

"No, but I ought to be doing something useful. It would be useful."

"Useful!" said Miss Willey. "It's the greatest privilege in the world!"

But the other woman was silent.

"You'd have to go to a training school, you know," said Miss Willey. "They've come in since my day. You'd have to—to get a post."

That was daunting. She turned to Gladys Moore: "Did you?"

She nodded. "But you'd be a fool to; there are too many teachers now. It isn't as if you had to work for your living."

"You don't like it much," said Olwen.

"What else was there? It was better than getting married!" From the sulky defiance of her tone Olwen knew that she had never been given the choice, poor thing! Poor starved things—both!

"She likes it better since she's come here," said Miss Willey. There was a certain tenderness in her poor, thin voice; perhaps children liked her for that. It was a faint echo of the motherliness so many of them missed at home. "We have such good times together, reading and talking and going abroad in the summer holidays—just like sisters, you know. . . ."

She believed it all; but Gladys Moore did not. There was something suppressed in her. In Miss Willey it was not suppressed: it had never blossomed—only withered. And so they were building—had built—their lives, all the lives they would ever have. . . .

Olwen shivered; she wanted to escape: "You must come up to see me." She got away somehow, and was out in the twilit road.

"I couldn't—not that. That's not the way," ran through her mind.

Well, she had her own fireside and her father's armchair—she had those. It might be selfish, the way she lived; but if no other appeared . . .

There was a new book from London: not a novel—she read few novels—but a book on heredity and environment. One of

her indulgences was to buy new scientific books as they came out; she bought them and she read them and she thought about them.

She read until it was time to dress for dinner. She always dressed, just as if her father were still alive. But now it meant only slipping into a black dress of softer lines. It did not take long.

As she brushed her hair she happened to look at her face between the candles. It was the first time in weeks she had done so. She was startled at its thinness and sallowness. She would be old before her time, going on like this. As if it mattered! Yet it mattered enough for her to fumble in her box of laces, to find and put on a narrow collar of rose point that her aunt had long ago sent her for Christmas. So—it looked better; he would have liked the change.

Dinner was the worst time of the day. In the cold dining-room—for why have a fire for so short a time and for one person only?—in her black crêpe shawl, with the place across the table empty, and the ridiculously small joint between the candles . . . She always hurried through dinner, and hugged the library fire until the coffee came and after. Sometimes she went on reading; but more often she thought. That was usually all until bedtime. There was rarely a visitor.

There was one tonight, however.

Why did not Gwen answer the bell?

It rang again, loudly; and yet again.

No Gwen. Olwen went to the door herself.

A few flakes of snow drifted in—a man's face. . . . Jack.

The world was full of unimportant people.

XX. SHE WAS TO REMEMBER THAT

THERE he sat by the fireside—not at all the Jack of her dreams. No khaki, no gun, no freckles to speak of, and quiet—no showing of foxy teeth. A very ordinary, personable, tanned young fellow in well-cut clothes, sitting by her fireside as if he belonged there.

"You'll have coffee?" She rang, and Gwen came at last, looking cross. Probably she had been at the back gate with some man or other. It would be beginning again. The thought buzzed about, even in Olwen's bewilderment in having before her this strange young man who had been the familiar Jack.

"You escaped from the Rhine, then?" she said, as he seemed in no hurry to speak.

"Escaped is the word," he admitted. But he seemed quite satisfied to sit and look at her and say nothing.

"You bowled over a whole row of Roman senators last night," she went on nervously, and gave him a hazy account of her dream.

But all he said was: "You're wrong. I wouldn't have left you, not even in a dream. Some mistake. But I'm glad you dreamed about me."

It was difficult to know what to say to that; but he found words to go on with, himself: "You're looking seedy. No wonder. I didn't hear until today." His lowered voice made it clear what he meant.

"When did you come down?" she asked.

"An hour ago. Came straight here—oh, after dinner at the 'Bird in Hand.'

"You might have come to dinner with me," she said; and, as she spoke, thought how much better it would have been to have him in the empty place at the end of the table.

"Thanks." But he seemed to be blocked again.

"Are you staying on?" she asked, to make conversation. "How are your people? They've been away from home a long time."

"That's the War," he grinned, and the teeth showed. "I'll hardly get them down here before spring now—house boarded up and all. Myself, I'd rather be out with the guns any day than knocking about town; but I'll be going up again after I've settled some business with Clay. . . . The Pater was coming down, but I offered. . . . I got your last letter, old thing."

"I wondered if you had," said Olwen coldly.

"But you can't put me off like that, you know."

The coffee had come; she could busy herself with that.

"All the same . . ." He did not find it much easier to talk now than he used to do.

"Well?"

"All the same, I'm not going to go on waiting all my life."

She was suddenly angry; and glad she could be angry: "I've told you no five times!"

"And you'll not tell me it five more." Evidently he had not lost his old temper. "When I've made up my mind I've no chance . . ."

". . . you'll marry another girl," she ended for him. "Well, do. Make up your mind. It's no earthly use!"

"I don't know yet," he said. "I've done some thinking these last three years—I've not seen you for three years, do you remember that? And I know my own mind. Now it's only common sense . . ."

"Common sense!" she jeered.

"That's what the world goes by," he insisted. "It's only common sense that you and I . . ."

"Oh, don't go over all that again!"

"I don't need to. But things have changed these last years. I've changed. You've changed a lot—even I can see that. I'm only asking you to look at the matter sensibly. It's silly to go on saying *no,* like a parrot."

Certainly she had not been talked to like this before; certainly she had not. But she was not angry.

"Do you want to dry up into an old maid?" he shot at her. Dry up into an—a Susan Willey, a Gladys Moore? But he had gone too far this time: "What's that to you?"

"It's a lot," he said doggedly. "I've asked myself, more than you would think, what I see in you. You're not so much . . ."

"Go on," said Olwen, with a sudden little sparkle in her eyes. She was beginning to be interested.

"I'll not, then. You'd only poke fun. But it comes to this: I'm going to try to get you to see reason, unless . . ."

"Unless?"

". . . unless there's some other chap in my way. There wasn't. . . . Is there?" No disguising his anxiety.

"Give me your cup," she answered; and in the moment she gained, wondered whether she spoke truth with her "No."

"That's enough, then," he said. "I know where I am. I'll be going. But you'll see more of me."

He rose, and she rose with him, not finding anything to say.

With the new brusqueness which made him seem unfamiliar, he laid his hands on her shoulders and shook her a little: "If I could shake you into your senses!" he said.

She could not help smiling: "I'm too old, Jack."

And he: "I'll give you the winter to make up your mind. I wonder"—he seemed to be thinking aloud—"whether I'd

better come down now and then to see how it's getting on, or whether I'd better stay away altogether. No, I've tried that for three years. You'll see more of me."

Somehow it was pleasant, all that kind of talk. He was changed, perhaps changed more than she knew. Well, it would be strange if he had come through without.

"You've told me nothing about your—about the War," she found herself saying. She really wanted him to stay on a bit, then?

"Oh, that?" He took his hands from her shoulders. "That can wait. Plenty of time after. Too soon now."

She went with him into the hall. He found his hat and stood shaping it with his hands. Evidently there was something more on his mind.

A cold draught blew against her cheek through the door that led down the passage to the kitchen. The kitchen door must be open, then. Gwen and some man, as she had thought. . . . Was there nothing in this world but courting and marrying and having children and bringing them up? . . . Oh, yes, and dying. . . . And a good thing, too. . . . Why couldn't he get it out and go?

He found no words, but he acted. Something happened to the hat she was watching. She was pulling away from strong restraining arms; he was trying to find her lips. But he got no more than the touch of a cheek before she was free and indignant, too angry and breathless to speak.

But he did not seem to mind—only stared a moment, then threw back his head and laughed, caught up his hat from the floor, twirled it on his fist a moment, and was gone.

"You little fool!" he said as he ran down the steps.

She was to remember that.

XXI. DAYS AND DAYS . . .

SO, THEN, the winter set in, with nothing from outside but Jack's renewed letters—too frequent, because one could not help turning to them with a certain expectation, and there was never anything in them of the slightest interest. Not the most fantastic imagination could have construed them as love-letters; but wits less shrewd than Olwen's must have seen in their elaborate accounts of the young man's doings a determined effort to make her think about him. Unfortunately the accounts were merely detailed and dull. Perhaps it was as well that the writer did not see the promptitude with which each missive in turn was consigned to the back log and poked into perdition.

Yet they came from outside; they left in the mind certain echoes of the world beyond the daily routine of a small empty house in the Forest.

On Christmas morning came something more tangible.

It had been sad work getting ready for Christmas. Always before they had made much of it, with a shopping trip to Gloucester, hints of dark secrets that turned into the most desired treasures, with the happy sending out and gathering in of cards and trifles, with all the old-fashioned ceremonies, even to the Yule log. This year it seemed to be expected that she would carry on. Gwen set to work on the puddings without waiting to be told; Wagtail brought in holly from the garden; presents and cards began to come, and invitations which she could not accept. No, she would go through the

expected forms; but she would companion her own thoughts that day. It turned out differently.

Before she was up there came a long peal of the door-bell; and on the tail of it Gwen appeared, carrying a fat basket, double-lidded and with a handle.

A lifted lid revealed a small blue-grey muff with astonished golden eyes, a muff that then filled the opening, expanded itself, and leaped like a small cloud of feathers on the bed, picked a careful way to a vantage point, looking down upon the person there, and uttered—what might be translated as "Hello!"

"Hello yourself!" said Olwen. "Who may you be?"

That appeared from a card in an envelope attached to the handle of the basket:

"Hope you like him. He looked good to me. His name is Pillicock, but you can change it, of course. Jack."

Thereupon Gwen volunteered the information that the basket had been brought by the stable boy from Whitecross. This, however, was no Whitecross cat—Olwen knew them all well. He came from at least London, more likely from Fairyland.

Olwen put out a hand, and Pillicock did frantic obeisance with his head, rubbed it against the five-fingered source of cream and caresses until he almost turned upside down.

Olwen gathered him to her breast—it was like lifting a ball of eiderdown that had been lying in new-mown hay—and felt the chill there grow warm under his purring.

"Pillicock you are," she said, "and the missus that brought you up and named you was a genius; for you are Pillicock and nothing else. Are you going to stay with me?"

And Pillicock said "Ay."

It was something to get up for on that grim and rainy Christmas. And Jack was—well, Jack had his points.

Came a memory—an old, old memory, so long forgotten that it seemed impossible it should ever come to life again:

The pond at the cross-roads after school. A crowd of small boys—too many to count—all shouting and throwing stones at something in the pond, something that swam and was pushed off and swam again.

Herself running; her pinafore catching on a furze bush; herself tearing it loose and running; plunging into the pond, muddy to the waist; gasping and clutching and pulling out—a squirming, half-drowned kitten.

The torn pinafore for protection, the victim squealing and squirming inside, not yet knowing it was safe, and herself telling the boys what she thought of them.

They backed away—oh, how they had backed away!—those millions of small boys.

"But why did you *do* it?" she had demanded.

They could not out-face the Doctor's daughter; besides, she was older than most of them—a little older.

"To see if it could swim," they whimpered. "It's Davy's kitten."

"No, it's not," she had retorted. "I've saved its life and I'm going to take it home and keep it. And if any of you boys dares to touch it . . ."

Somehow they had gone, and she had the wet, dirty little thing against her cheek; and there was Jack Winter, a much bigger boy, coming through the gate from the woods and looking down at her.

"So you like cats, eh?" he had asked, with pitying condescension. "A good dog for me any day."

He had walked on, whistling; but he had remembered.

The rescued one had grown into a fat and pursy ginger-and-white, who made her home in the stable and had seasonable kittens, most of whom disappeared under Wagtail's discreet supervision, one always being kept for utility and loved by Olwen more than it deserved.

It was curious that Jack should have remembered about the kitten, all these years.

The difference it made! Oh, it made a difference, a Pillicock in the house! For it was impossible to forget him; and it was impossible not to waste time on him; and the long days grew shorter.

After a tramp along the muddy roads he was something to come home to; he was something to bring treats home to; something that would sit on its hind legs and beg like a little dog when the treats were chicken livers; something you could talk to; something that insisted upon catching its own tail when you wanted to snuggle it; and that insisted upon snuggling in your lap when you wanted to do something it interfered with; something that knew very well how to govern a household of two silly women—and did it.

It seemed that Jack Winter was not without a certain cunning.

But his letters undid him. If he had come down often, in the bullying mood in which he had made his one visit. . . . But his evil spirit suggested writing. And he wrote endlessly of nothings: things he did; people he met, and what they said to him; gossip; scraps of news—all so dull, so dull. . . .

Then one day—well, this:

"Kingsland—you know Kingsland? Yes, he said he knew you. The Pater and I stumbled on him at Prince's yesterday. He had almost finished his lunch when we came; but we sat at his table because the Pater wanted to speak to him. Seems he'd had it in mind for years. Well, he asked him to let us add his acres to Whitecross. House isn't much good, of course —take a deal of doing up, and we don't need it. Kingsland said he'd think about it. Then we talked about the men we'd known abroad. Perhaps I didn't tell you we were billeted in the same village in the Savoy for three months? Well, we were. Good fellow, Kingsland; but eccentric as—well, I mustn't say the devil.

"But here's the news that took my breath. When he'd gone,

a chap named Enderby came up—hangs about the Old Vic. and all that, knows actors and plays. Said Kingsland was going to have a play brought out at the Old Vic. soon, a play he'd written for a coming-on young actress named Weston; said they are going to be married at Easter . . ."

There was more on the next page; but it was not read then.

Pillicock had not had his morning cream, and said so; but he had no reply.

He repeated his claim, with emphatic woe; but he had no reply.

He jumped on a lap with a stiff paper lying on it, and he was firmly, if not unkindly, pushed down again. And not a word about cream.

When Gwen came to clear away, and found she was too soon, he followed her to the kitchen and had his belly filled and sat in the doorway, washing himself decently.

But Olwen left her food untasted, until Gwen came a second time. Then she left the room without a word, Gwen staring.

It was not as if she had been thinking about the man; for of course she had not. To the best of her knowing, she had scarcely given him a moment of her mind since her father died.

But yet there was something—there must be something to account for the sensation as of sharp knives falling and cutting through consciousness so that mere breathing was a pain. There must be something to account for that. The man was nothing to her, less than nothing now. Shut the door and forget. . . . But if she had been forgetting all these weeks and months, what more could be done? What was it that caused this stabbing pain as she breathed?

Was it because of that one night at Joy's Green? No time to remember that now, when he was to be married at Easter to an actress named Weston—he who had said . . . No use

remembering what he had said. There were women in the world probably who could make a man go against anything he had said or sworn. . . . Her problem was to get rid of the pain which had no business to be at all. There must be some forgetfulness more absolute than any she had known. Certainly, if merely not remembering could leave one a victim to this pain. . . .

Jack, of course. He was the way. Go to live at Whitecross. Then to remember any other man would be a sin. She had sinned enough—once—at Joy's Green. . . .

But would he have to know?

Where in this world of people was there any one who could give help on that?

There stood Pillicock, wistful for a game; but she would have none of him.

She could send for Jack himself. He would come by the next train. But once there, what could she say? There were things that could not be put into words.

In spite of Gwen's protests that she was not well, Olwen got into her weatherproof cape and walked in the rain. She went on, through the winding forest ways, not knowing where she was, for hours and hours, deliberately not thinking, yet stopping now and then for the pain that stabbed when she drew breath.

It was like the sliding down of a sharp steel—like a guillotine—like . . .

She stopped in her swift walking, and stared across a little bridge at the open portal of a castle. Had she come all the way to St. Sidwell's? There flashed into her mind an old story she had read somewhere of a knight who was riding into a castle, when the people within let the portcullis drop. He got through, but his poor horse was cut clean in two. That was the way it felt; she knew now.

The rain which she must have unconsciously fled before

as the wind drove at her back was in her face as she turned homeward. There would be miles and miles of it like this; but at least it was something to fight, something that would make one forget everything but itself. Beating against the sting of its lashes, one could think of nothing but the end of the journey. It was the different kind of forgetfulness for which she had been crying.

But when she was safe home by the fire, and Gwen, with mingled laments and grumbles, had pulled off soaked shoes and stockings and brought warm slippers and hot drinks and food, memory went on as before, laughing at her efforts to suffocate it. It seemed to have thriven during her miles of stumbling through the rain.

She lay on the couch by the fire and tried to look at things as they were. And when she turned her head, restless with the vain effort, there stood Pillicock, with expectant eyes.

"You've had your dinner," she said.

"Ay," said Pillicock.

"Well, what more do you want? Love?"

"Ay," said Pillicock.

"You young idiot!" she said.

"Ay," said Pillicock, and jumped soundlessly up by her side and bumbled.

But Pillicock was no more than a bit of warm fluff for the hand.

And the afternoon stretched before—and the evening—and days and nights interminable. . . .

Reading was the thing. Dad used to say there was more meat in a good book than in most men. What book, then? What meaty book?

She tumbled Pillicock off. He went and sat on the rug, with his shoulders hunched off huffily against her and his face to the friendlier fire.

Pepys? Yes, he was one of the meaty ones; she remembered

that Dad had said that too. Open anywhere . . . divination . . . see what he had to say to help one forget. And this is the way it went in her mind for a time:

"To Dr. Williams [who was Dr. Williams?], who did carry me into his garden." Why "did carry"? . . .

"To Dr. Williams who did carry me into his garden." . . . Carry? Carry? . . . What was the man talking about? . . .

"To Dr. Williams, who did carry me into his garden, where he hath abundance of grapes . . . grapes . . . where he hath abundance of grapes. . . ." Oh, yes! "To Dr. Williams, who did carry me into his garden, where he hath abundance of grapes." . . . What was that? Oh, yes. . . .

"Grapes: and he did show me . . . did show me . . . did show me how a dog that he hath do kill all the cats . . . all the cats . . . cats . . . that come thither to kill his pigeons." . . . What was that? oh, yes . . . "cats that come thither to kill his pigeons, and do afterwards [who do afterwards?]—afterwards bury them; . . . [Bury whom?] . . . cats that come thither to kill his pigeons . . . his pigeons? [Whose pigeons?] and do afterwards bury them; and do it with so much care that they shall be quite covered . . . covered? [covered what? Oh, the pigeons] that if the tip of the tail hangs out [the tip of the cat's tail; what cat?]—that if the tip of the tail hangs out, he will take up the cat again, and dig the hole deeper, which is very strange . . . very strange . . . which is very strange [what's strange? That cats should kill pigeons?]—if the tip of the tail hangs out, he will take up the cat again, and dig the hole deeper, which is very strange; and he tells me that he do believe he hath killed above 100 cats. . . ." Is the man mad, or am I? What is all this about dogs and cats and pigeons? . . .

"Home to my house to dinner, where I found my wife's brother Balty . . . Balty . . . my wife's brother Balty . . . as fine as hands could make him, and his servant, a French-

man, to wait on him, and come to have my wife visit a young lady."

There you had it—life in the seventeenth century: cats and grapes and dogs and pigeons and my wife's brother Balty and a young lady—marrying and giving in marriage. . . .

She tossed Mr. Pepys urgently away and sat up abruptly: "Pillicock!"

Pillicock did not turn, either at the noise of the book or at the call. His shoulders still looked annoyed, but they may have been merely contemplative.

"Pillicock!" she said again. "From this moment that man is forgotten. Do you hear?"

Pillicock did not—or care.

She got off the couch and knelt on the rug to pick him up: "It's got to be done. Do you hear? Got to be done now. Do you hear?"

Pillicock drew his head back and looked at her in mingled astonishment and disgust; he did not like the warm rain on his fur; he wanted to get down, and the woman would not let him. What was the matter with her?

And that was the life of the cat. He came and fondled her when he felt like it, and when she was in trouble he licked her tears away. Then he sang a song to himself by the fire and cared for nothing else in the world. What did he know about his hundred poor brethren Pepys told about? She laughed a little, fumbled for the book, and read on.

Turn the page. What did it mean? Well, turn back, then. Read on . . . pages and pages . . . turn forward . . . turn back. . . . It would mean something some day if one kept on. . . . Keep on, then . . . pages and pages . . . days and days. . . .

XXII. INTERLUDE

THERE was an odd little interlude that happened soon after Easter. It was to make its mark in Olwen's growth.

Jack Winter had written letters and letters—if the foolish fellow had but gone himself—and to them all Olwen had nothing but silence.

Easter came and went, and the week after, and the week after. . . .

At last—perhaps it was an innocent plot, his plot or Fate's, to make her see—he wrote:

"There's a friend of the Mater's gone down to the Forest. She's staying at the 'Danby Arms' with her kids. You might look her up. Mater got to know her at the Hospital. Went to see her husband; lost a leg, poor chap! But he's getting on all right now. The Mater's been taking an interest in them—not too much money, you know. He'll be going down later. You might look her up."

So Olwen went.

All the beeches were in bud, their copper sheaths flashing into palest green, as she went up and down the Roman road between them. The oaks were still black, with tags and tatters from the year before. No, they were greening also—a faint mist.

She avoided Joy's Green, kept to the paths well to the left, past the worked-out pit, under the greatest of the beeches, so tall that their new leaves seemed a screen against the far sky, and so came to the tiny forest inn on the hill slope that

overlooked billowing treetops to the far blue hills of Wales.

She went through the wicket into the paddock, where two shaggy colts were grazing, past the ancient holly tree with its great girth overrun with ivy, through the second gate, to a long, low stone house with square flags scrubbed clean before it. A bronze chanticleer and his brown females were pecking about. Beyond the house, on a sunny grass slope sat a young woman with a small child propped up near by and apparently chewing turf; from a little farther on came the shrill voices of two more children, interspersed with the joyful cachinnations of a dog.

The young woman looked up from her needlework, saw Olwen, and smiled a welcome.

She held out a friendly hand; but she did not rise. It was evident that there would be another baby in her arms soon.

There was exchange of names, of questions and explanations, then—

"Do you know that your infant is eating turf?"

She moved a little, and glanced at the grubby face of the young person so engaged: "Good for him. I put him out to grass purposely."

And the infant was delectable, even in his dirt.

"Will you sit here?" said the mother to her guest. She held up for inspection a fragment of white garment. "Like hem-stitching?"

"Lucky babe!" said Olwen. "When is it expected?"

"Three months. I can hardly wait."

"Aren't you afraid?"

"Afraid?" Not finding the scissors in her ample lap, she bit off a thread with strong, milky-looking teeth.

"When the time comes, I mean."

"Oh, that! Some women do make a fuss rather, I suppose." She paused in her stitching. "It is bad enough while it lasts; but when it's over you're always surprised to find how soon

you forget. Like sea-sickness, you know; and there's something in giving up—like letting yourself go with the motion of the ship. Besides, it's always easier after the first. I've had three." She flung a negligent hand in the direction of the two who were busy with the dog.

"At least," said Olwen, "you don't look as if you're having a bad time now."

"Bad? I'm never so well. . . ."

"But my father has told me—he was a doctor, you know—about some women who . . ."

"That reminds me of poor Violet Higgins.—Why should I have thought of her, I wonder? I hope she's getting on all right. . . . There's a case, if you like. Scared to death every time; and look at her poor little kiddies! . . . I went to see her just before I came here: she was always begging me to—had to have somebody to talk to, and her husband, he always has business somewhere else at such times. I can't say I blame him. Such a fright she was, in a pink negligee with a face like saffron—really. And her breath—poor thing! She wanted me to wail with her over what she called the 'hideousness' of the whole 'business,' but I thought it was better for her if I laughed. I told her I thought we did look rather clumsy lumps and I didn't believe my doctor when he talked to me about my beautiful lines. No, I said, it's clumsy enough, and I wouldn't have had it that way if I'd had anything to say about it; but it's worth it, every time. Then she began to whimper about being afraid. I tried to tease her out of it: said it was a dangerous matter, living; she might any day pick up a germ that would carry her off in a week. But I made no impression. She came back at me with the complaint that men were beasts. First there was submitting to a thing you hated with all your soul. . . .

"'Do you?' I cut in. 'Oh, me! I don't. I think it's the best

thing in life; I mean, well—not even counting the kiddies, you know.'

"She looked at me as if she was thinking I was beastly too. It didn't pay to be honest with her. She wasn't that kind.

"She began to rail about girls being trapped; but I cut her short. My patience was nearly done. 'Trapped? Stuff! I can remember the time when you were in love with your husband.'

"She couldn't deny it, but she had another grievance: 'In love with him!' she said. 'More fool I! A man like him! Do you know what the business is that takes him away at the very times when he might be some good to me? Leicester Square, that's where it is—or Pimlico.' She was working herself up in a way very bad for her."

She paused, looked at Olwen, and said: "But I oughtn't to be talking to you like this. You don't know what I mean by business in Leicester Square or Pimlico."

Olwen's cheeks burned. "I'm not altogether a fool," she said, not without a certain anger at the condescension. "And ever since I've been grown-up—and before, too—my father used to talk to me plainly. What's the end of the story?"

"It's not yet—not so far as I know. What I'm afraid of is that she'll get desperate and go to one of those wretched abortionists again. Not this time—it's too late, of course. But when I tried to console her by saying that if she felt that way about it she was lucky not to have a child every year, like some women, it came out. She *had* been to such a place. She'd tried some quack remedy or other this time, only it hadn't worked. Well, I know what I'm talking about; I've been through some things myself."

Her lips settled into a line rather grim. She stitched in silence.

"Would you trust me with a sleeve?" asked Olwen. "I can hemstitch pretty well."

"I hoped you would offer," was the reply. "I'm making a lot of things for this little girl to come. It didn't matter so much about the boys."

"Girl? But how . . . ?"

"I'm willing it, see? It's time for a girl. We need a girl." She laughed, half apologetically. "You know—no, you don't know—there's no life for a woman until she's married."

"No, I don't know." Olwen's head was low over her work.

"If you know good advice when you hear it, you'll run away and catch a husband at once."

"How?" asked Olwen.

The other woman looked at her, as she drew out a long thread: "You don't have to ask."

"But I did ask." Again Olwen was irritated.

"Do you mean to tell me there's not anybody . . . ?"

"Oh, if anybody will do!" Olwen could be scornful now.

"Well, to be honest, I don't think it makes much difference in the end. You needn't gasp; I mean it—exactly that. And I've had enough experience to know; at least, I've had two husbands."

"Two?"

"Yes. And if Godfrey should die . . ." She stopped and shook her head. "Of course, I don't let myself think of it much. But when I do think about it, I know in my own mind —I should marry again."

Olwen had dropped her work and was staring.

"Yes, you quaint little forest nymph, I should!" She laughed and nodded her head vigorously: "He wouldn't be Godfrey, of course; but he'd have to do."

She read in Olwen's eyes the question unasked, and continued: "Yes, I'm in love with him, Goosie! . . . And I was in love with poor Tom. . . . There was a time. And Violet Higgins thinking nobody in the world knows anything about it but herself . . ."

The turf-eating infant, having satisfied his curiosities about the portion of earth he could reach, began to scramble into her lap. She laid her hem-stitching aside, drew from a pocket a large handkerchief—suspiciously like the unknown Godfrey's, Olwen thought—and began, without paying the slightest attention to shrill protests, to wipe off mother earth and green stains from hands and face and bare knees.

Olwen had time to study her a little. Not pretty: she could never have been called pretty; but with a certain full-blown comeliness now. She was no doubt better-looking than before she became the mother of three children, with a fourth coming. And her pale eyes were pleasant to look at—like her speech, honest. And a mouth it might be nice to kiss. But her hair—perhaps Godfrey did not mind the way her wispy blonde hair straggled and blew about her face and her general look of being a little—was it unkind to say frowsy?

She settled her offspring in her arms at last, apparently to the great content of both.

Then she went on, as if there had been no interruption: "That was a time I never cared to talk much about. I came nearer to knowing then what life can do to one. . . . It was the War, I suppose—yes, the War. You see, Tom was one of the first lot to go—just out of school—engineering. We were engaged, and expecting to be married as soon as he had a good billet. Then he went away to camp instead. Came back on leave two or three times, and me sewing on my wedding things and hoping. . . . Then he had to go abroad—no time to get married—only an hour for good-bye. We loved each other. Can you understand?"

Olwen nodded, feeling the blood crawl about her heart.

"Nothing wrong about it, was there? There was not. But there he was in France, and me at home. And I had to pay. I knew I should have to pay. I was living at home, and people hadn't got used to what War does. There was I, wonder-

ing when they would begin to notice. I couldn't imagine what would be said. For a while I thought I should go out of my mind. If I could have made a good excuse for leaving home; but I couldn't. They didn't suspect; but they wouldn't listen to anything I said. And I couldn't quite make up my mind to run away; at least, I waited to—I thought it would come to that some day. But they were strict people; they had their ideas of right and wrong, my father and mother. Perhaps that is why I am a little—free, now, should you say? But I couldn't face breaking their poor hearts. It was like a knot pulling tighter and tighter. I remember I took to reading a certain kind of advertisements; but I didn't dare. I was a fair coward. One day I did get so far as to take a tram to one of those places and to climb the dingy stairs to a room. The woman called herself a doctor. I looked at her, and turned without a word and almost tumbled down the stairs. But at the bottom I heard her calling: 'What are you afraid of, my dear? Come back.' As I stood paralysed, she said, in a tone meant, I suppose, to be encouraging, 'Oh, you'll come back. They always do!'

"But I was saved. Tom came back on short leave, and we were married. And before Baby came he . . . he's buried over there."

"Is this good enough?" Olwen showed her hemstitching.

"Better than mine. This babe's asleep. I'll just carry him in and ask them to send us out some tea. . . . You see, I came through all right."

"I suppose we always do," Olwen ventured, "or we should die."

"No"—with her funny little headshake. "That's not the only alternative. We know there are some who go under. . . . When I come back I'll tell you about Godfrey. He'll be coming down this week-end. He's lost a leg, you know; but he's learned to manage wonderfully. And it doesn't make

much difference with his work: he's a solicitor; perhaps you don't know."

Her voice trailed back after her as she went away, carrying the heavy child almost as a sort of balance to her big abdomen.

Olwen bent over her hemstitching; but her mind was busy. How unutterably strange that this woman, a woman she had never heard of three days ago, should have come down to the Forest to tell such things! Why? Was there an unseen linking? Did things have to be as they came, in a kind of order disposed by the Unknown whom men called God? If so, the thing was, not to fight—to let one's self go in the ways of Nature. Was Nature the true name of this Unknown?

But she had little time for speculation. The young woman's voice blew back before her, as did her wispy hair: "They'll be bringing the tea soon. You know, a one-legged husband is better than none at all."

"Especially when you are in love with him," said Olwen.

The other woman took up her work: "Yes. It was a bad time when he was wounded. And I had no word for days—weeks. . . . But we came through that all right . . . like we do others. It's a hard road we women have to tread to get our children, isn't it?"

"You mean . . . ?"

"I mean, no woman's any good till she has had children. Oh, I beg your pardon; but you know what I mean. You'll come to it as sure as we're sitting here. I'm talking about the women who don't see that there's nothing else."

"They seem to find a lot," said Olwen. "They study at the Universities, and go in for the professions—teaching (she remembered Miss Willey and Miss Moore) and art and music. There's hardly any profession they don't go in for now, is there? And they make great successes, don't they? Almost every kind of work has women in it, working along just like men."

"We've learned that from the Americans," she said placidly. "Poor fools!"

"Who? Americans?"

"Anybody who thinks women can be turned into men. If we have women doing the men's work, the men will have to set to and do the women's, I suppose. I don't know how they'll manage about bearing the children. But perhaps by that time it will be the millennium, and we shall not need any more children."

"You mean," said Olwen eagerly, "we've got to give up to Nature?"

"Well, what happens when you don't?" was the quick counter-question.

She spoke as if she were the very fount of wisdom, Olwen thought, again a little nettled; but before she could say anything they were confronted by two small boys, with a much smaller dog between them; the three had the look of being a deputation.

"Mummy," said the spokesman.

But she signed that ceremony must come first—that is to say, proper introductions. "This," she said, "is my son Thomas, generally answering to the name of Tom; and this is Godfrey; and the tail-wagging person with his tongue hanging out usually comes at a call for Toby. The youngster with a taste for grass will some day be addressed as George, but at present is commonly referred to as Babs." She turned to Olwen with an aside: "Soon to be deposed, we hope, and thereafter Georgie, or something of the sort."

"Mummy," said the spokesman patiently, "may we take my ship and sail it in the brook?"

She put her head a little on one side and pursed up her lips in consideration: "I thought I heard Daddy say something about doing that on Saturday."

"But I want to do it today," said Tom firmly. "Now."

"Me, too," said Godfrey.

"Me, too," said Toby's eyes and tongue and tail.

"Before tea?" She affected surprise. "It would be a pity to miss tea. There's jam—strawberry; I saw it."

"But when?" said Tom. Evidently appetite was brewing discontent.

"If you went now to wash your hands," she said judicially, "I don't think you'd be late. Not if you hurried."

A moment the deputation hesitated; then strawberry jam won.

"C'mon, giddy Godfrey; race you to the steps."

"C'mon, Toby, race you . . ."

They were off.

And Toby caught the word and beat them both.

"That was an easy one," said the diplomat. "Sometimes the nuts are harder to crack. But it's living, you know. Sometimes I ask myself what I should have done if I hadn't made Godfrey propose to me. . . ."

"Made him?"

"Of course. Haven't you done that little trick yet? Sure? You will admit, when you see Godfrey, that he's very good-looking—no, I'm not prejudiced: you'll see. And lots of women courted him; and if I hadn't shown him how to plant his feet, first one, then the other, on the road to matrimony, I shouldn't be here today; nor—what really matters—these kiddies of mine."

"Didn't he want to marry you?" Her frankness seemed to warrant the question.

"Not he. Nor any one. He didn't know what was good for him, bless his dear heart! I suppose many men are like that—real men, I mean, not domestic pussies. Most men who are worth their salt in all other ways have to be shown what's good for them, poor dears! At least, that's my experience."

It was certainly the moment for the "Why?"

"They talk a lot about their freedom, of course—as if anybody ever had such a thing. If they haven't wives, they've mothers and sisters to keep them tied; and then they get all tangled up in free love affairs, and, if not, with women of the streets. Don't talk to me of freedom!"

She hummed a little and bent to her work.

"Finished," said Olwen, holding up her sleeve. "Don't you suppose," she went on in a tone quite as casual, "there are some men who can't marry?"

"Some who think so because they don't know what it is," was the prompt reply.

"What is it, then?"

The amazing young woman screwed up her eyes with laughter: "That's a secret. But I'll tell you. It's nothing—nothing at all. . . . O Grandmother, what big eyes you've got! I'll tell you. What happens is this: you stand up before some clergyman or some J.P., no matter which, and he says words which nobody listens to. All they're good for is to stop people from talking when they see you two together. You are free, you two, to make what you please of life. You don't have to stick together—not any more than you please. You can go and come as you like. You simply go through the form of the law and pay a small sum, just as you pay your income tax. And that's all there is to it; and you are as free as if you hadn't done anything of the kind."

"You—and your kiddies?" Olwen asked.

"Well, Godfrey isn't bound. I want them. If he wanted to go off by himself, I'd work for them. But"—she wrinkled her eyes and looked sidewise at Olwen—"I think he will never want to. I think I know how to keep a man, now I've got him."

"But, then, he is bound," said Olwen.

"Not if he doesn't know it. What's freedom but a state of mind? Well, he's got that. Besides . . . Oh, don't you see?

No man and no woman could ever get out of life more than half its value. How could they? When you're married you get the other side—double value;—and when the children come, triple, multiple. Don't you see? . . . I hear the rattle of cups. And how I've talked to you. Are you cold?" For Olwen could not altogether hide her trembling.

It was an odd little interlude; but it was built into the structure of Olwen's life.

XXIII. A FEW WILD FORGET-ME-NOT?

THE next morning two letters. One from Jack, of course—tossed aside with a frown, unread. The other addressed in a strange hand—black, eccentric, obstinate-looking, very far indeed from the copybook hand. She wondered whether Kingsland's hand would not be like that: she had never seen his writing.

But the envelope contained no letter, only a blank half-sheet of paper and a newspaper cutting, which her mind raced through with a strange prescience.

She had been right. Miracles did happen. One had happened.

It was a very commonplace newspaper item: might have been cut from the *Morning Post,* perhaps. It announced that Miss Allardyce Weston had been compelled to give up her work for the present and had gone to Aix-les-Bains to recuperate from a nervous breakdown, and that the production of Mr. Kingsland's play, "The Chain and the Cup," was therefore postponed.

Olwen read and re-read it, with a fast-beating heart. It might mean no more than the words said; but—who had sent it to her? Whose was the eccentric black writing on the envelope? Who would dream that the item would interest her except . . . ? And why should he care whether it interested her or not, unless . . . ? And certain it was that he had not married the promising young actress with the strange name. Or was it? Actresses kept their stage names.

Perhaps they were married and he had gone with her to Aix-les-Bains? There was nothing to contradict the possibility, except that the cutting had been sent. There was a reason for this. In this reason lay the miracle. And the miracle was that the end between them had not yet come.

She might have sat there until her breakfast got cold if Pillicock had not had more sense. He came from the hearth-rug and tried the effect of a fixed stare. As it did not work, he made various polite, low-voiced remarks, reinforced by an occasional tug at her dress with a well-bred paw. When his patience gave out he resorted to the trick that never failed to win—stood on his hind legs with begging paws. It worked this time, but with results so damaging to both fur and temper that he gave a shrill prolonged squeal which brought Olwen to her senses.

She poured the cream and ate her own breakfast.

Afterward she read Jack's letter. It was short. And flat, as usual. But it stated a fact: he was coming down this week-end. It was clear that he was irritated.

She flew to the old secretary for paper and pen, and kneeling in front of it wrote her reply. It was no time for hesitation. Poor Jack! But it was no time to be kind. There had been one miracle; there would be others. One could wait now; there was something to wait for.

Kneeling in front of the old secretary, she wrote, addressed, sealed, and stamped her reply.

Pillicock came and stared with round eyes. It was only then that she realised her attitude—which might or might not be symbolic.

Poor Jack! But if they had gone on, how much poorer Jack! It was a wife he wanted—some wife, any wife; he had merely got used to the idea of her, that was all. Now that he was cut off from that, he would find another woman, and quickly. They had been saved, both of them: she from a

bore, he from a shrew—perhaps so bad as that!—by the timeliness of a scrap of newspaper. Chance! Was it chance? But if not, what?

Whatever it was, it had lifted the portcullis, opened the door. There was nothing very clear to go on to Oh, yes, there was an April garden.

With Pillicock on her shoulder she went out among the bobbing daffodils that lined every path; among the tropical tulip parrots that squawked their joy in mere sunlight; among the regiments of small blue squills that made a patch of sky in the earth; out on the sun-dried lawn, stepping carefully among the hordes of barbaric crocuses, with Pillicock, down now and sniffing most delicately here and there at a grass-blade, and affecting to be scared by a flicker of shadowed stems.

One could wait: one could wait all the long summer—if there was anything at the end of the waiting. For the columbines would soon fling their pink and red and white and yellow and blue and purple caps all over; and the pansies would be wearing their hearts on their sleeves; and the naughty starlings that lived up under the eaves and filled early morning with their soft whispers would swoop and nip the pansy hearts and toss them on the lawn, Wagtail chasing them, purple with rage and effort. And there would be irises to make one forget the daffodils—honey-heavy, purple iris, pearly iris, golden iris, and spidery Japanese iris. And the Canterbury bells and the campanulas would be ringing all along the hedges until the hollyhocks peered over their shoulders. And the path to the terrace, unvisited for the greater part of a year, would be between blossoming hawthorn and lilac and laburnum. She could go back to it now and look out at the Severn—a winding silver lake.

And in June the roses: the pink and red and yellow ramblers that almost hid the house; the stiff beauties in their

special beds, pampered by Wagtail until each flaunted satins and velvets of Kashmir, baskets of perfume for the summer and jars of pot-pourri for the winter. . . .

A hedge of sweet peas like a host of butterflies, clove gillyflowers, shirley poppies self-sown wherever the earth left a crack for them; until at last the dahlias and chrysanthemums. . . . But she did not want to think of these; there was all the long summer between.

Better to sit on the doorstep and throw old acorn shells for Pillicock to catch and retrieve. Better to watch the sailing clouds high above. Better to listen to the invisible lark, higher even than they, singing himself out of hearing. Better to . . .

She sprang to her feet. Her veins were filled with the sunshine of April and her heart was flying like a swallow to its memories of Joy's Green. . . .

At a man's shadow athwart the path she turned with a start. But it was only Wagtail with a question about the rock garden. The bleeding heartses, he said, had all died, and should he set a few wild forget-me-not?

XXIV. THE RETURN

THE news ran through the village. The grocer's boy told Gwen; and she brought it in with the tea.

"Bob Prickett, 'e's come 'ome, Miss."

Olwen, hemstitching, with Pillicock curled like a blue muff in her lap, pricked and sucked a finger: "No!"

"They say so, Miss."

"Where's he been all this time?"

But Gwen couldn't tell; she had heard no more.

"I'll run up and see his poor mother," said Olwen, quite as if it were a disaster. "What a wonderful thing for her—if it's true."

Gwen insisted that they said it was true. Only today they had brought him down from London in a motor. . . .

"They? Who?" But Gwen could not say.

So in the April sunset Olwen was up and down the Roman road, over the brook and into the wood where long swords of golden light pierced the shadows and turned half the tree-trunks green; where the tops of the oaks and tall beeches were trellised with their young leaves; where the furry bracken fronds were uncurling among the red-brown wreck of last year's foliage.

Up through the woodland path she ran, but paused and drew a sharp breath at Joy's Green. There was the oak, there the deep moss. . . . And the fragrant April weather was running through her body with a thrill that made her breath-

less. It was as if those yellow swords of sunlight were piercing her veins.

A few steps, and there was a dark glimmer to the left—the pond, with its tangle of water weeds. The swords of sunlight fell: a heavy white cloud had crossed the sun. From over the hill crest somewhere a cuckoo began his mournful call.

Was she superstitious? Had she read somewhere that the cuckoo's cry meant bad luck? In a world where miracles could happen—this coming back of Bob Prickett, the second—she flung aside the omen.

Mrs. Prickett opened to her knock, with eyes swollen and inflamed with much weeping, and her apron in her hands, ready to begin again.

"It isn't true?" asked the girl, with a swift pang that was not unselfish. Would her second miracle fail? Still there was the first.

Mrs. Prickett fell blubbering in her arms with a torrent of words, in which "God's goodness" and the "mercy of God" could be distinguished.

"It is true, then," said Olwen.

Oh, yes, yes, it was true at last, the old woman admitted. But it was almost too much to bear after the long waiting—the long waiting. . . .

"There, there." Olwen tried to soothe. "Don't cry so. He'll run away again if you do. Is he all right? Where has he been?"

"Every limb of him, Miss," said Mrs. Prickett. "But they 'ad 'im took prisoner, like, somewhere in Germany; and when 'e come back 'e 'adn't 'is clothes nor 'is ticket—I don't rightly know what you'd call it, what they give the soldiers to know them by when they wore 'urt or . . . And 'e didn't know 'is own name, Miss. . . . They 'ad 'im in a Horspittle somewhere—I don't know where it wore; but 'e couldn't tell

them 'is name nor where 'e come from . . . nor nothing. . . ."

"But how did he get back?"

"Mam!" A querulous call.

Mrs. Prickett put her finger to her lips: "That's 'im."

"He knows you, then?"

"Thank God!" said Mrs. Prickett. "And 'is Dad. But 'e don't know much else or seem to care. But they say as 'e'll come all right, now as 'e's at 'ome."

She silently pushed open the door into the kitchen. On the settle lounged a gaunt shadow of a man, less than the shadow of burly Bob Prickett. On the other side of the fire sat his father, watching him with his head in his hands.

Although the door had not creaked, he was poised on the defensive when Olwen looked.

"Come now, Bob, where's your manners?" said Mrs. Prickett, with feigned sharpness. " 'Ere's a young lady to see you what you used to know. Don't you remember Miss Olwen?"

He grunted and turned his face to the fire again, not troubling to greet her.

"I was just going to give 'im 'is tea," apologised Mrs. Prickett.

"Go on, do," protested Olwen. "I'll come another time." She added under her breath, "When he's settled in. Don't worry. He'll come to himself all right. They do, you know. Give him time."

"But," pleaded Mrs. Prickett, in tears again when she had drawn the door to behind them, "what 'ave they done to my boy? That's what I want to know."

"It's the great noise," the girl tried to explain, "the great noise of the guns, they say. Ruins the nerves. You must give him time."

" 'E's been through a lot," said Mrs. Prickett. "And there

ain't no wound on 'im, not one. 'E's come back safe, after all that long time of waiting. . . ."

"Try to forget that," said Olwen. "You've got him, you know. He'll be all right soon."

"That's what they tell me . . ." began Mrs. Prickett, and stopped to listen. She fancied he was calling again.

"Who did?" asked Olwen. "Who brought him back?" She was almost petulant: she wanted to understand this second miracle, to know whether it was really as wonderful as it seemed.

" 'Aven't you 'eard, Miss?" said Mrs. Prickett. "Well, now . . ."

But the querulous voice called again "Mam!" and she went in without apology.

Olwen walked slowly away, with bent head. Was this to be the end of the mother's long waiting? Would the boy, after all, recover enough to be a help, and not a mere drag on his parents? Was all the mother's sorrow for this only? Would it have been better had he died in prison, or had he not been found and restored? The things our hearts cry out for—when we get them at last, what of it?

XXV. DO YOU? DO YOU?

SHE walked slowly along the road under the high, ivy-crowned stone walls that shut Kingsland from view. She was so close under the walls that a great dangling spray almost struck her in the face. She wondered whether anything had been done to the garden this spring, whether he had left orders that anything should be done to the garden. She had a sudden unconquerable desire to go back and see. There would be no one about now. She turned and almost ran back to the stone steps that rose to the mounting-block, and up them, and looked through the wicket gate. It seemed all a-tangle within, a mess of browning daffodils and overgrown lavender and weeds.

She lifted the latch softly and stepped in. Silence . . . emptiness . . . desolation. . . . No sound except that among the ivy-crops heaped in great mounds everywhere along the wall, some sleepy bird—perhaps a wren—was cheeping faintly. The sun had gone down behind the hills, but had left great trails of faint rosy clouds in the pale blue sky above Severn.

There was a startling flutter of wings, and a robin stood looking up at her from the sun-dial. Why should he be expecting crumbs?

Her back was to the old, grim house and her eyes were on the blue and purple folds of the hills—the forest-covered hills —when the third miracle happened.

She did not start or scream when Anthony Kingsland's arms went round her. She simply did not think it was true

when she turned slowly in them to look and her eyes met his, and then her soul fled away into the long darkness of his kiss. She did not think it was true.

He seemed content to look and say nothing; but the warmth of his body was all round her, and it seemed that if she put up her hand to touch his cheek it would be real.

"You can't be you," she whispered at last.

His laugh was startling; she had known him to laugh so rarely. "No," he said. "Don't believe it for a moment."

Then the darkness of the long kiss again. . . .

This time it was he who spoke: "If I were here," he said, "that's what I'd do to you. As I'm not—but if I were, I'd do it—again. . . ."

Then she had to be free—to find out where she was. All the world seemed to be tumbling about her.

"Come up to the porch," he said, "and I'll tell you."

He brushed with his handkerchief—that action seemed real enough—one of the dusty side-benches, and drew her down so that she was all within the hollow of his arm. "Didn't you hear," he asked, "that I brought Bob Prickett home? I thought you must have heard that. I thought that was why you came."

She shook her head slowly. "I heard nothing. I came up to see Mrs. Prickett because I couldn't believe he was home; and then I came here because—I thought I came because I wanted to see whether you had any garden left; but I must have come, really, because some of me knew you were here. . . . Are you?"

"I begin to think I am," he admitted.

Then she was happy enough to ask about Bob. The miracle, it seemed, was no miracle. He—Kingsland—had the habit of dropping in now and then at some of the hospitals, looking up men of his own, leaving cigarettes, and so on. He'd been having a smoke with one of his men, and when he left the man spoke his name. Prickett, sitting by, had lifted his head.

"Kingsland? That's where I live." The rest was easy. He'd brought the poor chap down in his car—hadn't she seen the car by the road?

"So you didn't come to see me?" she asked.

He hesitated: "I couldn't trust myself to do that."

"You wouldn't have come down to see me?"

Again he was slow. "Not if I had continued to be wise," he said at last.

"And when you saw me in your garden you thought . . . ?"

"I didn't stop to think, my dear."

"So you do—love me still."

"Well, it almost looks like it, doesn't it?"

"And you did, all along?"

"From the first day, Olwen, and all along."

"Yet, when my father died—you must have known he died. . . ."

"Yes. But you don't know how often I tried to write, and tore the letters up.—What could I have said? I dared not send any of the letters I wrote."

"But, at last, you sent the cutting—didn't you?"

"More fool I, perhaps," he said, with rather a grim smile.

"Could you—could you tell me why you did?"

"I don't know that I could, Olwen—or can."

"You must have wanted me to know . . . ?"

"About the play? My near-production, now postponed indefinitely? Perhaps. Shall I send you a copy?"

He was going back, then.

"No. I meant that you were not going to marry that . . ."

"Good Lord! I never meant to marry the woman! I had to make up to her a bit, to get my play read; and the silly fool thought . . . They talked, of course; and she let it be known. . . . I had the devil of a time cutting loose! But I thought you knew my mind on that. Marriage! That's a form of hell I hope to escape!"

Twilight was settling in now; it was time to be going home. She drew herself away and said as much.

They stood in an awkward silence, which she broke at last: "Well, we have met again; and so—good-bye. You're going back tonight?"

He thrust his hands into his trousers pockets and looked at her sideways:

"What is there to stay for?"

"Nothing—so far as I know," she said coldly.

"Well, you should know," he retorted. "If you say there's nothing, I'm off."

But it was impossible to let him go like that. And he was no slower than she in their coming together again. Indeed, as she looked up into his face after they had kissed she imagined tears in his eyes. Or were her own too thick to see?

But there was no mistaking his tone: "My dear! my dear!"

And she: "What can we do? What can we . . . ?"

Suddenly he drew her back into the shadows: "We can't stay here, at least. There's some one going down the road now."

Then it seemed to her as if all her mind were full of voices crying, "Now—now—now! You must!"; as if her ears were ringing with the sound of them. She wanted to speak, but could not for the tumult in her blood that drowned speech; she could scarcely hear her own voice for the beating of her heart. Yet she was speaking—she knew that: "If I could—if you want me—if I could . . . ?"

"You would? You would?"

She could not help drawing back; there was a hunger in his voice as of a wild creature.

"Come in, then!" He seized her arm.

"Not here; not now," she gasped.

"Where, then? Where we . . . last summer . . . ?"

She shook her head desperately, remembering the pond.

But at last she managed to say what was in her mind: "Tomorrow—if you are staying on—come in by the garden gate—at my house . . ."

"Gwen?" he asked.

"She goes home for the night, once a month. I will leave the door unlocked."

He held her off by her elbows, trying to see her eyes in the now dense twilight: "Not unless you really want me. Do you? Do you?"

XXVI. WOULD HE COME SO LATE?

THAT night Olwen did not sleep or desire to sleep. Sleep would have been death to a body tingling from head to foot with new life.

The past had vanished; the future was unbegotten; there was nothing but the awakened Now, in which every breath meant living.

She was not impatient or restless, but content to feel the singing in her blood through the long darkness. The small noises of the night pleased her. They were out there; she here, safe in her strange new happiness. The whispering of leaves; a soft rustle of rain, falling and stopping; the far-away bark of a dog, scaring a fox perhaps; the momentary whiffle and wail of an owl; and then, when everything else but herself seemed asleep at last, her nightingale—the nightingale that loved the honeysuckle at the garden end. She had seen him there in the moonlight, more than one year. And now she must get up and run to the window, to hear him the better. But that was *it!* That was the way she felt. How could a bird know? Her breathing followed his every swing and curvet, to the long, clear *tereu* that was almost too much to bear. He sang on and on, the lovely thing!

"Joy's Green . . . Joy's Green . . ." like a voice, like a flash of light in the darkness. As if a sudden candle had been held to her face, Olwen covered her cheeks in the darkness and crept back to bed.

And after a time there was only the wind in the leaves,

and the April rain that came and went, until some chanticleer awakened and called the dawn, then another answered, then one cockerel after another, in shrill emulation. And after that, silence and the slow lifting of the veils of darkness, until, the grey fully there, came the sharp clatter of hoofs and rattle of wheels on the road, and at the back gate the milkman's call "May—*yolk!*"

Then first Olwen dozed a little.

When Gwen brought her morning tea she started herself awake, and looked up with a sense of alarm and guilt. What could there be about Gwen's face to disturb her like that? What could Gwen know?

Looking at herself in the glass, as she had not looked for many a day—month—Olwen smiled at her own image, flushed, and smiled the more. She was so bright-eyed, the girl in the glass, so—oh, well, one couldn't call one's self pretty; but pink cheeks certainly helped a lot.

She went down to breakfast, still in her dream, and found Pillicock in her chair. She knelt by him with her chin just above his furry poll so that caresses might be made easy. "You don't love me, Pillicock—not really," she said.

He gave her chin a perfunctory rub, this way and that way, just like some people's morning kiss; then, with one paw daintily poised on the edge of the tray, he looked at her and remarked that Gwen had forgotten the cream jug again.

"Cat love!" said Olwen disdainfully. "Cupboard love! I'll throw you over and find somebody else."

But Pillicock showed no concern: his view was plainly that a man must eat to live; and all this business of love-talk on an empty stomach. . . . He went to the hearthrug and did a brief wash.

When the cream jug arrived he made a flying leap to the knee of the person by the tea-tray and superintended the filling of his saucer.

"There," she said, placing it on the rug. "Now go and lap it up. Aren't you a greedy, conscienceless, materialistic, selfish little beast?"

"Ay," said Pillicock, following her.

"It's cat-nature, isn't it? Not man-nature, is it? Men aren't greedy, conscienceless—are they, Pillicock?"

"Ay," said Pillicock absently, and got busy with the cream.

"Oh, well," said Olwen, "it doesn't matter."

After breakfast the Wheel of Fortune made a sharp turn.

Gwen came in to clear away and, with her hands in her apron, said nervously: "If you please, Miss, I should like to give notice."

Olwen, thus rudely jerked from her dreams, hardly understood: "Now?"

"As soon as you can be suited, Miss."

Olwen pondered, chin in hand. She could hardly remember the maid they had had before Gwen. She must have been with them fourteen or fifteen years, and yet she was hardly thirty—not more, certainly. She had come to seem like a part of the house till that ugly affair about Bill Chard. But Gwen was a human being, and there had been no money to marry on—that was the trouble. The lack of money's the root of all evil. No, that was not quite right. . . .

"Is it more wages, Gwen?"

"No, Miss Olwen. But I'm going to get married and 'ave a 'ome of me own."

She spoke firmly now, as if she feared Olwen might try to stop her.

"Who is it?" asked Olwen.

"Joe Smith."

"That boy? Why, Gwen, he's not more than twenty!"

"He's earning 'is two-pound-eight in the pits like the other men," said Gwen, with a spark in her sombre eyes. "It's good enough."

"There's a cottage to let at Blackford," she went on; and at the name Olwen's mind went leaping back through the years to a day when she had gone with her father to see a sick child there: the table not cleared of breakfast, crumbs on the floor, a bold hen foraging, three small children besides the sick baby in its mother's arms, all huddled round the fire, with a driving rain outside, mud on the floor, a smell of greasy bacon, slops, and the vomit of the sick child. . . . Gwen wanted a home of her own.

Olwen sighed: "Very well, Gwen. You may go at the end of the month. I shall find some one by that time, or—I may be going away myself."

She had not known she was going to say that; no, she had not known it, but suddenly it seemed likely to be true. That was the thought that stung her heart to fresh gladness. Perhaps the break with Gwen was a sign . . . a sign. . . .

This was no day for hemstitching, or for darning fine linen, or for Bach or Scarlatti: for Chopin, perhaps; but she could not play Chopin.

She went out into the garden, an April garden with April clouds overhead. She found Wagtail digging among the vegetables in a rare gloom: his bad leg—his bad leg. . . . She tried to cheer him up with talk of the Old Age Pension: he was more than eligible. But he shook his head; he didn't want to be put on the shelf, like, not he; with the garden needing more than he could do for it, all the time. . . .

Still, it would have to come, said Olwen, walking between the ranks of daffodils. Like Gwen, he would have to go. . . . A sign . . . another sign. The future was dark, but things could not go on as they were.

What to do with the day? What to do?

She gathered flowers for the house: jonquils for the dining-room; a great sheaf of tulips for the library; pansies for her own room? No, they were like little bright eyes; no pansies.

Forget-me-not? Pretty, but sentimental. . . . There was a certain fierce red lily—an African lily—in bloom. . . . No, she would have no flowers upstairs.

But when the blossoms were all arranged and settled in their places it was still early morning, and there was nothing to do. She looked for Pillicock, but he had disappeared on his own business.

To read was as impossible as to sew. And one could not sit down and watch the minute hand of the clock.

She went upstairs and engaged upon a furious and unnecessary tidying of her affairs; and when she had done all her hands could find to do she was in a panic. This room! He would be seeing this room tonight. Impossible! And she would be what the village called careless. . . . Well, she was that already. What did it matter? . . . Yet that summer night in the Forest had faded to the unreality of a dream. It had not happened, it could not have happened to her; imagination could play stranger tricks than that. . . . But this night—this very night—he would be in this room. She shrank from thinking of it, and had to think of it. He would see—and carry away the memory—all her pretty things, all the pretty things she had gathered in years past. . . .

Her troubled eyes went from one thing to another. She could not help the thought: "It doesn't look like the room—of a bad woman."

She fought the word, and uglier words that coarse people might call her. "It's all right," she told herself, with desperate repetition, "because it has to be. What has to be is right. There's no other way."

But this was not the kind of thinking with which to make ready for the night to come. If she had given up to Nature, she must give up utterly—be glad in what is and is to come.

She looked again about the room to see what might need doing. As she dusted the reading-lamp by the bed she no-

ticed the green shade. Green! That must be changed. Green for the lonely reader; rose-hued. . . .

She flew for her hat, and on winged feet went down into the village to little Miss Bird's, the draper's. It was pink silk she was wanting, the most delicately beautiful pink silk in the world. Would little Miss Bird be having that?

She brought out what she had, poor little lame thing, all twisted with sciatica; and that was a yard or two of faint sweet-pea pink, and a little more of a flaming nasturtium.

"The pale," said little Miss Bird, "I sells mostly for the linings of babies' caps, and the bright's more for fancywork, like."

She held folds of the two together, to get the best advantage of the light in the dark little shop.

"I'll take the pale," said Olwen.

"Not all of it?" asked Miss Bird, with childlike delight. So much pleasure from so small a cause!

"Yes, all, for a lampshade."

Miss Bird's honesty clouded her happiness: "You won't need so much for a lampshade."

"No matter; I'll make the rest up into babies' caps," laughed Olwen.

Miss Bird's small nose was suddenly uptilted from the measuring—the woman lived on gossip. "You're going to be married?" she asked.

That cut; but the reply came with a naturalness that amazed herself: "Not I. Gwen. I shall make up the babies' caps for her when they're needed."

Gwen? That was a diversion that cried for details, and the details lasted until a pair of rheumatic wrists had measured the silk—three times, to be sure of accuracy, and, besides, it was slippery stuff—and had laboriously calculated the shillings.

"These girls are all for marrying," said Miss Bird, opening her drawer. Could she make the change? Could she? "Now

I myself . . . One shilling, two, five, ten. . . . I'll just have to pop in at the grocer's next door. I shan't be a minute. . . ."

Little Miss Bird—in her cage; yes, it was a cage, her small shop; but she was happy in it. . . .

Here she was back, gleefully counting out the change. She had made a good sale.

"Now I myself," she went on, as if there had been no interruption, "I know when I'm well off. There was a time, when I was a silly girl—you know how girls are—" she giggled, "that I would 'a' married any man that asked me; but nobody did—and a good thing too. But when Mam died and I had Dad on my hands, and him tied to a wheel chair for the stroke he had, I'd no time to be fooling with such nonsense then, what with him and the shop too. . . . After he died they come fast enough—and me, I wasn't so young neither. But I had the shop. 'No,' I says in my own mind, 'ye may come now all ye like; I'm done with that. I know when I'm well off.' And so I did. Men—well, you see, I'd sort of lost my taste for men, like, after living so long with Dad, poor dear! He was a great sufferer, Dad; and he couldn't help being a man. . . . But I knew when I was well off." She nodded her head sharply, and met a request piped from below the counter's edge for "A reel-of-white-cotton-number-forty-mam."

So that was her small story. Finished. And she was content. So little. Joy from a sale of a yard and a half of pale pink silk—pale pink silk, to a woman she would have mouthed all over the village if she had known. . . .

Known what? That she was making a lampshade for . . . ?

"No," said Olwen, "I'm going to be happy in the making of it." And she stitched all the afternoon, flaunting it in the eyes of Gwen. "I'm going to throw the old green thing away." She took a sudden impish delight in what she was saying. "It's bad for the eyes to read in bed. I'm going to go to sleep by this pretty pink thing. . . ."

"Yes, Miss," said the unsuspicious Gwen, brushing up the hearth.

"And what's left over," said Olwen, "shall be made up into cap linings for . . ." She stopped, oppressed with the memory that in this very room . . .

Babies! How one glossed over ugly facts!

"I'll make you something, Gwen," she said. "What shall it be?"

Gwen, on her knees, looked at her in silence.

"Miss Bird says she sells this colour mostly for babies' caps." Her defiant mood had returned. "You'll be having a baby, Gwen, before the year's out."

She did not look at Gwen's face; but she felt, or imagined. . . . Was it the old story over again? God!

"Oh, well," she said lightly, still not looking at Gwen, "it's too soon for that. Shall it be a dresser-mat—or a pin cushion?"

"Yes, Miss," said Gwen.

The afternoon had faded into a dim sunset before the lampshade was finished. Olwen came downstairs from putting it on, and sat by the library fire; there was a chill in the air.

With the tea-tray came Pillicock, very muddy and plaintive. He had been in rough ground: there were prickles and brambles in his eiderdown fur. He looked, for the first time in his young life, rakish.

"You've been up to mischief, sir," Olwen reproached him; and he had to admit it, though—not unlike his human brothers in similar circumstances—he was rather cross in doing so.

She got a brush and did her best for him, pulling gently, carefully holding the fur so as to do as little damage as possible. But when once she hurt, the naughty patient turned in anger and pressed with a paw of unfolding claws.

"You little beast!" said Olwen, tumbling him off her lap, and sucking at a bad scratch on her wrist. With his tail—still

not altogether clear from the trophies of his sin—high in the air, he followed Gwen to the kitchen. That was all he cared. Olwen sucked at her scratch.

And after tea she could lie on the couch and give up to dreaming; the time was so near now. Remembering yesterday. . . . How all life had changed since yesterday! . . . Was it chance? What was it? Not God, anyway: at least, the Vicar would not say it was God. Nor would Mrs. Cheriton; nor would any of the village gossips; not Miss Bird. . . . She found herself laughing.

Pillicock, who had come back unnoticed and curled about her feet waiting to make his peace, lifted his head at that, and crept, light as a small bunch of feathers, until he sat on her chest.

"Sinner!" she said. He blinked calmly, affected a sudden interest in the blank ceiling, dropped on his belly, and began to sheathe and unsheathe his claws in her dress, as a sign that he was willing to be friends again.

"Sinner!" she repeated; but he took no notice. She let him stay.

The clock struck seven; the gong sounded its soft tune of Burma; the ceremony of dinner passed.

Afterward—would the coffee never come? She could hear Gwen—the kitchen door open—humming fragments of song in her hoarse voice, and the rattle of plates. Would the girl never get away?

Coffee at last. Olwen's eyes were on her cup as she said sharply: "You're late tonight, Gwen. Your mother will worry."

"Yes, 'm," said Gwen. "No, 'm."

"What do you mean?" asked Olwen, speaking carefully for the swift chill in her veins.

"I dunno, 'm," said Gwen, and—hesitatingly—added: "I'm not going."

Their eyes met. Olwen fancied—it must be fancy—a suspicion.

"Why not?"

The girl shifted her footing uneasily: "Oh, I dunno. Joe Smith 'e said . . ."

That would be it, of course.

"Very well," said Olwen. "It's no affair of mine. But you must be in by ten, or . . ."

Again their eyes met, this time with a flash of hostility.

"Yes, 'm," said Gwen; and got away.

Presently Olwen heard voices in the kitchen and a man's laugh; and the house was clear of her.

A man's laugh—the laugh of Joe Smith, that underhung boy half Gwen's size! All for a home of her own, was it? Or for what?

Two hours—two hours and then she would come back and go up to bed; but she would be in the house. . . .

Olwen walked the floor in a passion of fear. If he came now he must go away at once: she must send him away.

A gust of April rain. Perhaps he would not come? Oh, it would take more than a gust of April rain! . . .

The time passed—it crawled, but it passed: the clock struck the hours. After ten—half-past ten—Olwen walked the floor again, her small fists clenched with rage and fear—the girl might stay out now till any hour, come in just as he came. . . .

Eleven o'clock—five minutes past—a slight noise in the kitchen—

Yes. Gwen lighting her bedroom candle. Not even penitent.

"You promised me," began Olwen; but her throat choked and she could not finish.

Gwen said nothing.

So Olwen went back to the fire, and sat without moving,

her heart leaping high at every small sound, in a panic of fear and indecision.

When Pillicock stood before her, yawning as who should say, "Aren't you coming up to bed?" she for the first time caught him up roughly and put him out into the garden. It was no great hardship to be turned out into an April garden, with a world full of good hunting. None the less, as she stood at the door she had a glimpse of a small astonished cat-face, before she closed it again.

And at last the clock—most deliberately—struck the hour of midnight.

He would never come so late as that! . . . and Gwen fast asleep now surely—surely. . . .

XXVII. AND IT WAS TRUE

AFTERWARD she wondered how she had got upstairs to her room. She had no memory of any decision that carried her there. Her first memory was of herself fumbling in her bureau for a strange Chinese silk robe that her Uncle Simon had given her years before, tucked away in the "bottom drawer" and forgotten, seen again today in her tidying. She remembered dragging out its lavender-perfumed folds —pale blue like the palest sky and embroidered with a riot of apple blossoms. Some patient brain and subtle fingers had toiled day and day and day that she might have it for this night.

She remembered tearing off her black dress—he should not find her in her black dress—tearing off all the foolish dainty trappings that hid the body, and putting them away. He should find her dressed like Flora herself, with her hair all about her. . . . But of course he was not coming—and she was quite mad.

And at last she was ready, and moving downstairs, one step at a time, her heart in every creak, a lighted candle held high so that she should not slip in the shadows.

If Gwen should see her! But there was no harm in the masquerade; for he was not coming—not so late as this. . . . And Gwen's room was at the back of the house, and her door was closed.

So Olwen came down with her candle. She was no more than half-way when a sharp little gust of rain beat against

the window and a draught from an opening door made her shield her candle.

He was at the foot of the stairs looking up at her, as the clock softly struck the quarter.

She turned and fled soundlessly, the candle-light outlining the steps. He followed like a shadow.

The room door shut, she silently turned the key: "Safe!" she breathed. A flash of memory—that old dream of the black corridors and the pursuing feet and at the end—well, here he was. She snuffed the candle and looked at him.

He was frowning at his hat and coat, wet with rain: "What shall I do with these things?"

"I'll take them," she said, under her breath.

Then she came back and stood before him, her hands clasped and hanging.

She could see the magic working, could watch it even as she waited.

A step forward, and with hands that trembled he had pushed the gorgeous robe from her breast and had bent to bury his face there.

And as she stood with her cheek against his soft, rough, wet hair, she wondered whether life could give better moments than this—than this. . . .

But it paled before the kiss that followed, with his arms fumbling under the embroidered silk robe and drawing her closer until she could not breathe. . . .

"Spring," he said. "Spring. . . ."

Then he held her off and challenged: "Well? Are you sorry I'm here?"

She did not have to answer that in words.

"Am I to carry you to bed? Or why don't you go?"

All in a flurry she slipped out of the gorgeous silk and found herself in bed with the sheet drawn up to her chin.

A moment she peeped at him beginning to undress; then she turned her face away with an arm over her eyes.

When she felt him coming near, his arm slipping about her, she whispered, "Shall I put out the light?"

But he said, forgetting to lower his voice—her heart quaked an instant for dread: "Why, no, Olwen. I want to see you. You forget I've never seen you yet." She must have trembled then, for he added, with sharp anxiety: "You don't mind? You're sure you don't mind?"

"I don't mind anything now," she answered softly.

And it was true.

XXVIII. SPRING IN HER EYES

HE WAS looking at his watch, which lay under the pink-shaded lamp: "It's past two. I must be going."

Olwen snuggled close: "Not yet! Oh, not yet!"

"Well, soon. What do you want now?"

She gently tugged to draw his head down to her breast: "I want you to go to sleep here."

"Then you'll go to sleep, and we shall oversleep," he resisted.

"I'll not," she said.

Amazingly he yielded and was asleep in a moment, breathing lightly and freely.

If she could only stop time so, only hang on to each second; another—another—another—only stop time there. . . . No matter if she grew a little cramped; no matter for that. . . .

But she moved ever so slightly; and on the instant he opened his eyes, alert: "What time is it? Good Lord! nearly three. I must go now, or the dawn will catch me."

She made no effort to keep him: only turned her face away and covered her eyes against the ugliness of dressing.

Half dressed, he sat down on the side of the bed and laid his hands on her shoulders: "Does it pay?"

She nodded, a little startled at his way of putting it.

"Well, then"—he let her go, and would have got up to finish; but she caught his arm:

"Let's talk a minute. When are you coming again?"

"Some day," he said, smiling—"some day before you're an old woman."

"Tomorrow?"

It was his turn to be surprised: "Tomorrow! My dear child!" After a second, he continued in his natural voice: "I thought I'd run up to town tomorrow as I'd planned, and come down again in about a week or so—if you can arrange so soon."

So soon? A week or so—or so!

He went away then, and came back, ready to leave.

"You look . . . What's the matter?" he said brusquely.

"A week *or so!*" she said.

"That's what I said. Shall I wait longer?"

She managed to get out a bare hint of the wild race of thinking that poured through her mind: "I don't understand. I thought—married people . . ."

"You thought they had this kind of thing every night? Is that it?" he asked, sitting down again on the side of the bed. "Well, so they do—while it lasts. But that is why it doesn't last. Didn't you know that?"

Her eyes answered.

He caught her up into his arms: "My dear! My dear! It doesn't last, you know. You must trust me. People wear it out—all this tremendous experience. Don't you know? We want to keep it, you and I."

"So you're going away again?"

"It's no use hanging about here, is it?"

"You could come openly, sometimes—to dinner, or . . ."

"Oh, no, I couldn't. Not with the village tongues. Besides . . ."

"Besides what?"

"Tell you some day. You wouldn't understand now. When you know me better."

"And what am I to do?"

"What did you do before yesterday?"

"Oh, not that way! I couldn't live on that way!" She stifled a sob in her pillow, and looked up, apprehensive.

Did he look disgusted, or merely disturbed?

"I'm sorry," he said curtly. "I don't know what to suggest. And I really must go."

She pulled herself together: "Never mind. I don't want to spoil things. We can talk next time you come, perhaps. But I should like to know when, so I—so I . . ."

He spoke with repressed irritation: "I can't be sure, Olwen. How can I tell now? You see, there are other people, other engagements. I'll let you know."

"You'll write to me?"

He hesitated. Then: "I suppose so. I hate letters: they never say anything."

"Oh, don't then. I shall manage." She plucked up a little spirit of her own. "When you come, you come. Leave it so."

"I'll come as soon as I can," he said, stroking her hair and forehead softly. "You're the dearest thing in the world to me, and I want to keep you. See?"

That paid for a great deal. Oh, that paid! She was smiling again.

"It will take a little management," he said, getting to his feet and stretching out his arms as if to suppress a yawn. Somehow that homely gesture brought him so near, so near —as if they had been together always. . . .

"Perhaps I could manage week-ends. That would not make talk. If you can get rid of Gwen, I might . . ."

"Saturday?" Her eyes were shining.

"I'm afraid it had better be Saturday week, my dear. Haven't you enough to live on until then?"

"Nine days," she said. "Oh, yes, yes! I shall remember. It won't be like before yesterday."

"That's my girl. And now how am I to find my way downstairs in the dark?"

"I'll light you." Tremblingly she wrapped herself in the rich silk, and tremblingly unlocked the door and peered into the dark, silent hall. When she looked back he had lighted the candle.

So she stood at the stairhead, listening over her shoulder, while he felt his way down. At the stair foot she could barely see him; but he, looking up, had a picture to remember: Spring with dark hair, with one pink hand screening the candle to make the light fall where it should, the riot of spring on a silk robe, the light of spring in her eyes.

XXIX. THERE'S A PRICE FOR EVERYTHING

IT LASTED nine days—oh, it lasted nine days!—like the Nine Days' Wonder!

For indeed there was so much to think about that she could not think at all. Her mind was a tangle of released strange feelings and unrelated thoughts, strung on an abiding sense of wonderment. Was she happy? She did not know. Was she distressed or content or ashamed or exultant? She did not know. She felt as if she had died to her old self and was arrived in a strange dark land where old ideas, old values, were useless, and where all life began over. And there were no words—that was the strangest of all. There were words enough for the thin upper layers of consciousness in which we move daily: but for the fiery depths in which new consciousnesses were being forged there were none. It was of no use to try to think when all thinking came to was "I don't understand."

One could count off the days. There were only Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday. . . . On Tuesday she found out that there are one hundred and sixty-eight hours in the week to be filled; in this first long week, however, two hundred and twenty-six. And of these nearly half, perhaps, might be used up in sleep and in the routine of the days.

They filled themselves somehow. Each day was a week; but the week itself went past. Came Friday, came Saturday. The columbines were beginning to peep out of their caps; it

was a warm night, and the moon would be riding high at midnight.

It must not be the same, this time. By what instinct she knew that, Olwen could not have told; but she knew. She got out a frock she had bought just before her father died—a blue thing, scarcely worn. It was time to put the black off: she could not let him find her in the black. And she was going to wait for him in the garden this time; she wanted to be with him in the garden. No doubt there was some echo in her mind of the love of Jessica—or of Juliet.

Gwen was in the kitchen, reading her penny novelette—no getting rid of her this night. . . . But she would be nodding and yawning by ten. Then she would get into her bed and into the blue frock that it was wicked to wear so soon—for other eyes than his.

Wicked? . . . That was no word to be thinking now. Dangerous, yes. But one must take chances. What could one hope for from life without taking chances? But she had written him to come first to the garden this time—so they could make sure of Gwen. Oh, the ugliness of it, dodging and hiding from a servant girl! . . .

In the kitchen window still the obstinate light: Gwen's only guide to the knowledge—penny lies—of experience outside her own. "Oh, blow it out, Gwen, and go to bed!"

But to this impatient willing, Gwen, all the length of the garden away, was deaf. Her light burned on.

Olwen tried to think only of her lover. What was he doing now? Was he on the road?—Oh, not yet. How would he come? Would the latch click ever so little?

He was suddenly unimaginable. She could not even remember clearly how he looked. She tried to recall him, feature by feature; but they refused to make up a whole. The most she could get was a certain sharp turn of the head, verging on

impatience, that inspired almost fear, and that chilled her remembering.

After all, what did she know of the man? What of his life? He had told her he lived in rooms—she had the address—and at his club; but she had no picture of his surroundings. What did he do with himself all day? He must write, of course; and he must go to the theatre often, a man who was trying to be a dramatist. Then, of course, he wrote reviews of new plays—he had to go to those. He must meet actors, actresses: there would be supper-parties. Perhaps he drank—they were supposed to be wild, people associated with the stage. . . . But what did she know about it all, away off here in the Forest? She knew only that their two lives were running far apart, must run apart. . . . No, there was no future. There was only tonight. He was coming. . . . The light in the kitchen window still. . . . Had Gwen fallen asleep over her book?

Her nightingale was silent. Perhaps he would sing when the moon came over the hill and made a white path in the river. There was a long time to wait yet: the church clock had not rung eleven. . . .

Incredibly he was there. He had come up from behind, and no sound from the gate. His hands were on her shoulders, tilting up her face. . . . There were no troubles in the world.

And presently he flung his hat on the bench with a sigh: "From hell to heaven in three hours!"

She did not know what to say to that—said nothing, and her nightingale spoke for her. Or perhaps he was only telling the dark world that the moon's rim was over the hill and spilling silver into the water—*ter—ter—tereu!*

Only for this it was worth while to have lived: to be in a garden full of fragrance and bird-notes, to watch the moon stride over the hill and fling her white banner on the Severn; it was worth while even though it would not last—not per-

haps a moment more; yes, one—and another—and another. . . .

"I never heard a nightingale so near a house." His voice broke the silence, almost gratingly.

"He's mine," whispered Olwen.

Perhaps he did not hear, for he asked: "What's the flower we smell?"

"Sweet rocket," she answered softly.

"Sweet what?"

She glanced apprehensively at the kitchen window. The light was still there. In her swift, helpless anger the moment was spoiled. She could not speak.

Then the church bell rang out eleven.

"I'm early," said Kingsland. "Can you think why?"

"I'd rather be told," she said.

He told her with a question: "Did the nine days seem long to you?"

She laid her face against his arm: "To you?"

He stroked her cheek gently.

"What did you do with them?" she ventured.

"With what? Oh, the nine days? Wasted them, of course—like all others."

"But there are different ways, I suppose. . . ."

"Of wasting time? I think I know them all. I'm not a Kingsland for nothing."

"Your work must have gone badly this week," she ventured.

"Work, you call it?"

After a pause, she said: "I cannot imagine your way of living. . . . I wish I could."

He gave a short laugh, not pleasant: "Is that a hint? Better not. It's bad enough to waste your time; worse to have to give an account of how you do it. So let's not waste any more of our precious night. Shall we go in?"

She choked with sudden tears of anger: "We can't. Look there." She pointed to the light in the window.

"Gwen? Well, send her to bed."

Go in—in her blue frock? And the next day all up and down Meend Street? But what was the use of trying to explain? Her joy was all smeared with ugliness. She shook her head in silence.

"Well, I can't, certainly." His voice had the dreaded touch of impatience. "What shall we do?"

"Wait a little. It won't be long," she whispered. He must think her a fool for not managing better. But this dodging and hiding from a servant girl as bad as . . . God! If one could stop thinking before the words came!

They sat in a wretched silence for a few moments; then the light went out in the kitchen, and as they watched a light showed in the window upstairs.

His was the exultation: "Not long now! Tell me what you've been up to, all the week."

She had no desire to tell: she was too troubled to talk. And there did not seem to be anything to talk about.

So in time the upstairs light also flickered out.

He caught up his hat: "Come along."

But she sat still on the bench, her eyebrows contracted, in the moonlight.

"Or, if you've changed your mind, I'll be off."

That was rather cruel.

Before she could speak or move he had caught her in his arms and was carrying her along the shadow-flecked path toward the house.

Half-way he stopped: "Well, shall I drop you here? No? What is love? You don't know. No one knows. But we've got it!"

Nearer the house he went on the grass to make no noise. And the nightingale broke her silence again and helped them.

As Olwen fumbled at the door, he whispered: "Wait! I've got something."

It was a flashlight, with which he guided their noiseless steps through the library, up the stairs, and into her room. Safe!

In the reaction from exaltation, fear—the stream of changing emotions—she turned on him with a swift bitterness as surprising to herself as to him: "Like thieves!"

But he only said quietly: "There's a price for everything. Is it too much—for this?"

XXX. BUT THE STREET WAS EMPTY

WHEN it was time for him to go she was fretful: "You're always going!"

"And coming," he supplemented. "This week will be shorter, mind."

"But I wish you could stay till morning!"

"And let Gwen bring me my tea—here?"

The poor joke roused her to fierceness: "Oh, why can't we be married, like other people?"

He dropped his hat, looked at his watch, and drew up a chair: "All right, go ahead. Say what's in your mind. As well now as later. But I can't stay long."

Of course then it was impossible to say anything.

He continued: "You asked me a question. I'll answer it with another. Suppose we were married, what then?"

"You wouldn't be going . . ." she faltered.

"True. Nor coming. I'd be here—or you'd be there—all the time. What of it?"

"We shouldn't have to hide. There wouldn't be this heart-breaking secrecy. We should live decently in the sight of the world!"

He obviously controlled his speech a moment, then: "Of course. I feared it. That's why I hated to get tangled up. . . . You're all alike, you women. Want a husband to lead before the public . . . in chains."

"What chains?" she flashed back.

He did not answer that. "Decent? It's a jolly sight more decent than marriage!"

If Gwen should hear voices?

He went on more quietly: "But suppose we were married, what then? How should we go on?" He attempted a smile: "How should you keep me from killing you?"

She looked at him in silence.

"You poor, ignorant child!" he said, with a kind of teasing pity.

"Are you God?" she whispered, "that you can override the rest of the world like this?"

"I know nothing about God. And as for the world, I've always found that most of it was pretty stupid. But I'm not trying to override it. I'm merely acting for myself."

"And speaking for yourself: if we were married—you'd kill me."

"That, my dear—curse it! I wish I could smoke—is what might be called humorous exaggeration, without the humour. But I might come home drunk some day and treat you worse than you deserve. That's no exaggeration."

He met her eyes with a steady: "Don't forget I'm a Kingsland. The blood may have run thin; but it's no better. Don't take things so hard. Can't be helped, you know.

"But suppose we escaped that," he went on, "we'd have to get through the days together—at best we should have to do that. Breakfast now. Should you be sprightly for breakfast, like Mrs. Cheriton? I always breakfast with my *Times,* and wild horses couldn't drag a word out of me. Vile temper in the morning."

"I'd keep off," said Olwen.

"Save your sprightliness for lunch, eh? But suppose I took a notion not to come home for lunch—as I probably should. What then?"

"I wouldn't mind," said Olwen. But she felt her side of the case slipping. . . .

"We'd be invited out to dinner. You'd want to go; I shouldn't. You'd drag me out; or I'd tie you at home. Sometimes one; sometimes t'other. No, you wouldn't go alone—no. Chains . . . chains. . . ."

She turned her face away; she had no answer.

He took her passive hand, laid his face against it, and kissed her arm all the way up to the shoulder: "Don't you see, dear?"

"Yes," she whispered, not moving.

"And if that were all, if that were all. . . ."

"Tell me all," she said.

"I can't. Not tonight. Perhaps some day. But use your imagination. Think of months and years of it: me struggling to go my own way—because after all, it is my own; the only thing I've got is my own soul—and you tagging along, or not tagging along. I should be equally uncomfortable, whichever you did. You'd always be there, waiting for me to give an account of myself. If you didn't reproach me you'd ask questions; if you didn't say a word you'd look; if your face showed nothing at all I'd feel—bad conscience, you know. And if I wanted to get drunk, you wouldn't like it, you know."

"Do you?" she flashed back.

But he said, unperturbed: "Sometimes. At least, I want to be able to if I like. You'd check me at every turn. . . ."

Olwen raised herself on her elbows: "Is it fair to judge me beforehand? How do you know what I'd do?"

His answer left her dumb. Kissing her hand and arm as before, he said with suppressed passion: "You can't deny you're a woman; and you're the prettiest and sweetest one I've ever known!"

There have been others, then, she thought, and laid the kissed arm against her cheek as if it might somehow give comfort.

"And there'd be the nights. How should I keep away from you? And I'd have to—or spoil it all. . . ."

"There's something else"—it was so hard to say—"there's something you seem not to have thought of at all. . . ."

"Oh, yes, I have. And I made up my mind long ago. I've no business to have children. And there's an end of that."

Another end, it seemed. And nothing to say.

He got up to go; but she caught his hand, speechless.

He looked down at her, his face in shadow: "After all," he said, in a curious constrained voice, "you ought to have had another man. I'm not the one for you. You're only in love with love. . . ."

But this was monstrous! He must be shown. . . .

He gently put aside her clinging arms and lips.

"You're not convinced?" she cried, in terror.

"No," he said, as if reluctantly.

"But what must I do?" Her voice sharpened with growing fear. He had to raise a warning finger.

"You'd know if you loved me," he said. "I can't tell you."

He moved away, but she entangled him: "I can't let you go with this: you must tell me. . . ."

"There! there, dear!" He tried to soothe her. "If we can't make a go of it . . ."

"But we can!" she interrupted.

He went on as if he had not heard: ". . . I'd better stay away."

She left him at that and sat down on the edge of the bed, with her face in her hands: "I couldn't bear it."

The touch of impatience she feared: "Well, you don't have to tonight. We don't have to settle everything tonight."

"You'll be coming next week, then?"

He was so slow to reply that her heart seemed to stop beating. At last: "If you wish."

"But don't you?"

"Yes, only"—then he was blunt—"if love is worth having, it's too good to spoil, isn't it?"

She tried to steady the whirl of thoughts in her dizzy brain; and at last looked up and said very quietly: "I'll try to get my bearings. When you come next week there'll be nothing of this. You'll find—another girl."

"She mightn't be so nice," he said, kissing her forehead.

"Yes"—she looked up—"you'll like her better."

"Meaning you'll make me a new Olwen in a week? Can't be done."

"It shall be done," said Olwen, on her feet then; but she bit back the other words that crowded to her lips: ". . . before I'll lose you!"

He must have guessed them, however; for he said sadly: "I'm not worth so much creative effort. Better drop me."

"But you'll come next week?" Again the fear.

"Oh, I'll come all right." Again the touch of impatience.

With that he softly unlocked the door and was gone.

Standing with tense nerves, she could not hear a sound on the steps or hear the outer door close. Perhaps he was used to . . . She drove away the hateful thought. But was he really gone? She crept to the window to see.

The moonlight was almost like day; and at her gate there was a shadow. Was he too tired to go on? Poor thing! poor thing! Had she worn him out with her hysterics?

A spurt of reddish light showed his face, with eyes downcast. Oh, he was only waiting to light a cigar.

She looked apprehensively up and down.

But the street was empty.

XXXI. COMES SO STRANGELY

AS HE had said, it is not so easy to make oneself over in a week. It is not so easy—even—to know how to begin. It was perhaps a beginning to know there was something wrong; but how was it to be put right if one knew no more?

That was the burden of Olwen's thoughts on Sunday and on Monday. On Tuesday she made up her mind: "Doctors must know. I'll find a doctor—some one who has never seen me—a woman if I can. I'll go to Bristol. There must be good women doctors in Bristol."

"The thing is," the train seemed to be saying to her all the way, "I've got to make it right if I die for it. . . ."

Over and over again the words were clanked and rattled in her ears. She was very weary of them when she reached Bristol.

In Bristol she knew almost no one, certainly no one to whom she could appeal.

Her head was aching so badly that she scarcely knew how to put her business through. But she got some tea in the first tea shop she chanced upon, and there borrowed a directory. She noted several names, and drove in a taxi to the first on her list.

There she dismissed the cabman, and as soon as he was gone went past the house, back and forth, several times. She could not make up her mind to go in.

Yet she could not stay in Bristol all night. The town would know; there would be gossip.

She turned again in desperation, and almost ran into a trim nursemaid with a rosy baby, coming out the door.

"Is the doctor in?" she managed to ask.

"No, Madam," said the nurse. "I don't know when she will be in. It's a maternity case."

"Oh, but I must . . . Do you happen to know whom she recommends?"

Without surprise, the nursemaid mentioned the fourth name on the list.

The house was not far. She found it without difficulty, but again her courage failed. Perhaps she would have gone away without ringing the bell if the doctor had not happened to come out just then.

Unmistakably a doctor, that small person, the unblinking eyes always weighing, judging; the wide, firmly-closed mouth; the alert air; the mannish clothes.

"You wish to see me? Come in." She held open the door. The smile which relaxed her rather stern mouth made it possible to go on.

"I don't know what to ask you, or where to begin," faltered Olwen.

"Why not begin in the middle?" Her eyes could relax and twinkle. She went on almost immediately: "You look a healthy young person; but there's some trouble. How old are you?"

"Twenty-six."

"Married?"

"Yes," said Olwen, then: "No."

"I see," said the little doctor.

But did she?

"Are you, as they say, in love with your"—she hesitated a fraction of a second—"man?"

"He says not!" It was out.

"But—you don't agree?"

Olwen's eyes were wild with the hopelessness of telling how much she loved.

"I see," said the little doctor. "Well, I'm going to give you something for that headache first. Then we can talk better."

She prepared some draught, talking as she worked: "It's a queer thing—what they call love—as queer as life—or death. We can't seem to get on without any of them, but nobody knows what they are. There, drink that. You'll feel better very quickly. Of course, the obvious fact is that there's no such thing as love; the term is simply a cloak for a multitude of mixed emotions. Sex, on the other hand, is a simple need—like hunger or thirst. With most people it's as imperative, when they are young. Unlike hunger and thirst, it is outgrown. But in the meantime. . . . And unfortunately, from the very conditions of the case, it requires two types of human beings so different that they never do understand each other."

She smiled at Olwen, who sat with her hands covering all her face except her intense eyes.

"No good blinking facts, is it?"

"But what is one to do?"

"You're too quick; you haven't got that *never* into your head yet."

"Does it mean *never* really? *Never* is a terrible word. When my mother died somebody told me she'd gone to heaven and would never come back. I went away and tried to imagine her above the clouds, trying to come down through them to the green fields again. Then I remembered that I should die myself some day, and that I could never break through those clouds of heaven and come back to my father here—for of course he would be waiting for me. I remember that I repeated the terrible word *never* until I had no more breath. It was burned into me."

"My *never* didn't go so far: it didn't go beyond this life.

I have no ideas except about human beings as I find them. Of course"—she paused a moment—"it's like that with all of us. We're all shut up in our little separate cells, knocking about with innumerable others, and very little consciousness gets through from the one to the other. But—for some reason—less between men and women than between persons of the same sex."

"But aren't there some old people . . . ?"

"Darby and Joan? Yes. But sometimes it's because Darby has eaten up Joan, and sometimes Joan's a man-eater. And sometimes each seems to have lost half a self, so that what we have is two poor grown-together halves, instead of two independent wholes—like twin almonds, you know."

"But what can one do . . . ?"

"To bring about understanding? I don't know. It comes—or it doesn't."

"So one just goes on . . . ?"

"I'm trying to think what I can say to you, how I can help. I've no experience of my own to go by. I've always been too busy to get tangled up in emotions. I had to work hard for my training; and when I set up my practice it was touch-and-go for years to make ends meet. I never had the time to be interested in men; and I'm not the type of woman to attract them. I'm telling you this because I'm going on to say that I believe my years of observation have told me more than any amount of experience. I'm quite unprejudiced, you see. Of course, most of my patients are women; but in France during the War . . . Well, no need to go into that. One of the hardest things to contend with is—the complete inability of most people to see any other point of view than their own. They can't help it—lack of imagination, I suppose. Still, it might be worth trying."

"Yes?" Olwen was tense, with tightly clasped fingers.

"For one thing—you may not know—men have a totally

different idea of the whole relationship that we call marriage."

"No, I didn't. . . ."

The little doctor's mouth relaxed again and her eyes twinkled: "Solomon in all his glory with his—how many?—wives."

"But I don't . . ."

"Understand? No. I'll try again. You see, what most men would really like is to roam about the world, seeking what they may devour. . . ."

"That's the devil," said Olwen, under her breath.

"Most women think it is like the devil," said the doctor, unmoved. "What they seem to want most is all kinds of experience—making the world over into their own substance; and some of them, of course, power. . . . But most women—I don't know why—don't seem to care much about experience in general. All they want is what they call love; and a home; and children. They're unhappy till they've caught a man and tied him to a fireside. . . . Most men come to it, sooner or later. They haven't much independence, or initiative, or courage, as a matter of fact; and they like to be comfortable. . . . Another thing: they don't do much in life; and many of them have dreams when they're young, and they pass on their dreams to their children. . . . A thousand dream and pass on the dreams, for one who does anything. . . . So, for the sake of that, and for physical satisfaction when they need it, and for the general greater comfort and peace in the management of life, they content themselves with—what shall I say—domesticity. Of course they break out, now and then—even the best of them, I fancy. The poor man dreams back his independence—for the time—in getting drunk; the man of means . . . Well, we needn't go into that."

"You're taking the men's side," said Olwen.

"I was coming to the women's—that's more important for

us, isn't it? Suppose we go back to that word *domesticity*. What does it mean to you?"

"Home; what I had with my father. If he had lived I should have been content till I died!"

"Perhaps. But you wouldn't have grown. You'd have died a shrivelled-up little girl. As far as I can see, neither a man nor a woman can go far without the other, whatever the relationship, whatever the trouble. That seems to me to be the clue to sex. . . . It isn't happiness that matters. What matters is the unfolding of the individual. . . . Were you never restless at home? . . . You see! The germ was there; it had to grow, if not through one man, through another."

"You think that too!"

The little doctor could not possibly know what was in Olwen's mind; but her question took another turn: "Why won't your man marry?"

"I don't know—unless . . . He talks as you do."

"What complicates the problem is the children?"

"What children?" asked Olwen, startled.

The shrewd eyes looked at her in silence.

Under it she fairly broke down: "Oh, you know—you know—how it nags one—nags. . . ."

"Yes, I know. And children mean domesticity. And apparently your man can't face it—a bad circle."

"Is there any use," said Olwen, "going on?—I have sometimes thought . . ."

"Of ending it all?" Most amazingly, she added, "How?"

At Olwen's stare, she smiled her quaint smile: "There are so many ways, you know. Twenty-six is rather young to give up. It doesn't give life much of a chance with you. But, as you had it in mind, which of the ways did you think of?"

Was she trying to make the girl laugh?

She went on, quite seriously: "When I was an intern in London we used to get a lot of people who'd tried the

Thames. Muddy they were and wretched; the police got them out in time—nearly always. There were others who took poison, but they nearly always got too much or too little; and it's awfully messy, you know. And a knife—that is hard to do—except on the stage: takes a lot of muscle. A revolver—how could you get one? Hanging—only insane people try that. . . . There's no way that's really decent."

"But aren't there times when your self—the self you have always lived with—is knocked down by something, something you don't understand . . . ? You don't know what has happened to you until after. . . ."

She was remembering Joy's Green.

"Undoubtedly. But it wouldn't happen to you," was the confident reply.

"You are wrong. It did—once!"

"Then it won't again. You've done that up—for life." She was unshaken.

"Well, but I've got to think what I *can* do!"

"That's what we're trying to get at. You've got to choose, it seems. You can't have children without a husband—all our War experience has not brought us to the point of countenancing that, yet. And it isn't fair to the kiddies to let them be born under such circumstances, as things are. And as things are, he's not satisfied."

"Suppose . . . I've lain awake nights thinking about it; but there was no one to ask . . . ?"

"Suppose there were a child. Is that what you mean?"

"Sometimes . . . Those were the times when I thought of ending it all; and sometimes I thought it might be the way out."

"That he would have to marry you, you mean. Yes, it happens—millions of times, I suppose. And in the long run those people seem to get on about as well as the others, as far

as I can see. It might be a way, and it mightn't. You see, I don't know the man."

"I hate life! I hate it!" said Olwen, and buried her face in her arms.

The doctor sat in silence until she looked up again, apologetic for her storm. "You're afraid of it, I think," she said quietly.

"Afraid?"

"And ashamed."

"Ashamed?"

"Well, you certainly don't know much about it. And, for one reason or another, you're a mass of inhibitions."

To her own amazement, Olwen slipped to the floor and laid her face in this strange woman's lap as if they were friends of a lifetime. "Tell me all about it," she said. "Tell me all you know about it."

And the strange woman took off her hat and stroked her hair, laid the hat on the table, and said: "How's that headache? Better? You are sure? Well, then, if it's a short lecture on physiology you're wanting. . . ."

At the end of it Olwen was very still, not lifting her head until she felt, rather than saw, that the doctor was consulting her watch.

"I'm keeping you . . ." She would have risen.

"I must go soon—not just yet: there's time for you to say what's in your mind. I didn't make life as it is; but that's the way it is."

"There is something," said Olwen. "You did not seem a bit shocked, or even surprised, when you found out . . ."

"We're reasonable beings—or think we are—in my profession," she answered, with her quaint smile. "Besides, that was not my business."

"Whose, then—a clergyman's?"

"I should rather think your own," was all she would say.

Olwen rose slowly and put on her hat. She was still thinking.

"It's all right, you know, if you've got your mind right about it," said the doctor, and went to a cupboard, getting out a bag and various bottles.

"I think I can do it," said Olwen slowly. "I said I should make myself over this week, and he said I couldn't. I think I can. I shall tear them out by the roots—all the inhibitions, the old . . . I don't know what, nor how I came by them. But I can. And what's more"—she held her breath a moment —"I shall not trap him into marrying me—not if I can help it—not unless . . ."

"There's very little risk," said the other woman, "if you are careful."

"But," said Olwen, "I shall be tempted not to be. And if I . . . Why, then, I shall manage alone."

"It won't come to that," said the doctor. She laid her hand on Olwen's, which was fumbling for her purse. "No fee," she said. "How could I? But you'll come again if you need me?"

"I'll come again if I don't," said Olwen, her eyes bright with tears. "I shall come back and tell you . . ."

"Do," she answered.

Not until Olwen was outside did she remember that she had not said a word of thanks; but the best things in the world are those for which no thanks are possible. Such a woman would know that, she thought, and would know that strangest of all things in life is the help that comes so strangely.

XXXII. WHEN MORNING CAME

IT WAS better, perhaps, not to think too much between then and Saturday; better to get the habit of taking the moments as they came and letting them slip by unregretted.

She occupied herself much in the garden: weeds—weeds—weeds, so early in the season. She made another effort to get Wagtail to apply for an Old Age Pension. She talked with Gwen about her wedding, looked out things to give her, took her on Thursday in the bus to Gloucester to choose a set of china for a present.

Three or four times she interviewed applicants who thought they might like to succeed Gwen; but each she sent about her business with a mental box on the ear. Good-for-nothings, these young things! There seemed to be a closed road after Gwen's leaving; but for that very reason—because it was closed—something would happen to throw it wide. She was sure of that.

She went to tea at the Vicarage and heard all about the next bazaar. No, she would not help, but she left some money.

She went to Mrs. Holliday's and heard the latest scandal about a girl at St. Sidwell's. "He'll have to marry her, of course," said Mrs. Holloway, busy with her tambour frame.

"Of course," said Olwen, but her irony was lost. "And then they'll live happy ever after." This time it was not lost.

"Well, *she* wouldn't if he *didn't!*" said the manager's wife sharply. "You must see my new stockings—the loveliest peach-colour!"

Olwen went away, with her head in the air, not minding a bit. Why should she care for the opinion of a Mrs. Holloway?

But she did not so soon escape the scandal. At the Post Office Miss Willey breathed of it under her breath. Mrs. Dobody insisted upon giving full details, quite unabashed, leaning over her garden gate. Everybody, it seemed, was talking.

"Gives them something to talk about," said Olwen, and thought she did not mind a bit. She had Wagtail's application, which she could not make him use, in her pocket.

And Saturday came—the kind of day when one could be happy by mere breathing. She tried to tell Pillicock about it, but he had his eye on a sparrow. And when, after the bird had flown, she tried again, he merely yawned: all his days were equally good, he seemed to say.

"So are mine," said Olwen to herself. "So are mine. They're going to be. I'm made over."

"You wouldn't—would you mind, Miss?" said Gwen after dinner. "Joe, 'e want me to go to the pictures with him. I wouldn't be late—indeed not, Mum."

But how things sometimes happened as they should!

So, then, there was nothing to do but wait. No, she must dress, she must make herself as pretty as . . . He always seemed to find her pretty. Well, but look out another frock. What if Gwen did see it when she came back? It was time to put off the mourning; she was going to put on a new life. There was a certain white dress she liked. If it was fresh. . . . Yes, it was. And the night was warm enough. Oh, she could spend a long time dressing tonight! She would light the rarely-lighted candles on her dressing-table and see how she could do her hair differently: she might try a ribbon. When Gwen found the candles next morning . . . But today

was today. . . . She might spend hours prinking; some women did. It would wear the time away.

So she brushed out her softly-waving, dark hair and coiled it high, braided and unbraided it, twisted it on her neck, tried it this way and that, with a ribbon, without a ribbon; and each time it looked worse than before, until at last she pulled it about her ears, and with laughing vexation vowed she wouldn't do it at all. In the end she put it up in a hurry, for the clock was striking ten, and he might be early. She had spent nearly two hours on the window-seat, dreaming.

She was not yet in the white dress when she heard voices at the back of the house, then the shutting of the kitchen door, and the heavy feet of Gwen on the stairs. She was out of the way, then; now let him come.

Was she made over? The glass did not show much difference—not more than would have been made by a becoming white dress and cheeks flushed with nervous excitement.

"I'll be matter-of-fact," she told herself, going softly down the stairs. No need to set Gwen wondering why she was still up. "I'll go down to the library and read some sensible book."

She tried one sensible book after another; but they were all unreadable.

She tried to rouse Pillicock for a game; but he was uncommonly sleepy—twisted himself out of her hands and went off again.

There were some accounts that ought to be settled before Gwen went away—there was a matter-of-fact thing to do. She began upon them; but the figures would not add. Oh, time . . . time . . . time. . . . Did the clock hands move?

At eleven she slipped down to the lower gate—not to wait there, just to look up and down the road. But there was no one on the dark road, and she came back. Of course, it was too early. . . .

Suppose she went to sleep? It would be rather nice to be

found curled up asleep in the big chair. She tried; but sleep would not come.

What to do, then? What to do? But it was not so long to wait. He would be here by twelve, or not later than a quarter past. It was a quarter past the first time, she remembered.

She began to walk the floor from fireplace to window. Why couldn't she be quiet and patient like a cat? Where was that cat? She called him, but had no answer. She began to walk again. As she turned quickly she saw Pillicock behind her, following her like her own shadow, turning when she turned. She pretended not to have seen him, called him again, pretended to search about the room for him. No answer; and still he followed like a shadow. It was his own game, and he clearly liked it.

"And they say animals have no minds." Her anxiety was touched with a moment's amusement.

But still the clock was very slow—very slow. She made herself sit still on the window-seat. "I will not look at the clock; and I will not move till he has come."

She had not been there five minutes, with Pillicock now curled up on her skirt, before she had to break her word.

Upstairs—there was an unmistakable noise upstairs. The sound of feet coming along the hall—a knocking. Gwen—at her bedroom door; she must have gone up the back way.

She ran upstairs in a panic. Yes, Gwen, with a candle in one hand, and the other hand pressed hard against her cheek; Gwen in her flannelette nightgown, with her greasy hair hanging in lumps about an agonised face.

But for all that her eyes showed amazement at Olwen's frock: "I can't sleep, Miss. I've got the toothache that bad. I come to see. . . ."

Olwen's mind worked with a flash. "Go back to bed," she commanded. "You'll take more cold in this draught. I'll bring you up something from the surgery."

But first she ran into the library, found a sheet of paper, and scrawled on it "Wait here," and pinned it where he must find it the moment he opened the garden door. It was time for him now—time!

Then, in a kind of mingled terror and shame and anger, she fumbled about in the surgery, too nervous to remember where things were, for a drug to relieve Gwen's pain and send her to sleep. She hated herself for thinking—what she thought —that the second was the really important thing.

She found a remedy and a sedative, and peeped into the library as she passed. There was no one. Well, so far.

But Gwen was in bad pain: she writhed and groaned with no sign of relief. "What brought it on?" asked Olwen sharply, her ears strained for sounds below.

Gwen mumbled something about sweets Joe had bought: she had bit on a nutshell, and it had broke her tooth off. . . . Oh!

She would never get to sleep that way.

Remembering that there was a spirit lamp in the surgery, Olwen went down to heat some water for a bag. . . . No one in the library yet, or when she went up with the hot-water bag. What a mercy!

She stayed with Gwen, chafing with annoyance and fear, until at last the sufferer's moans grew quieter and died into mere heavy breathing. Then she snuffed the candle and crept downstairs.

No one. The paper where she had left it. Pillicock curled up on the window-seat. The clock on the stroke of one.

Was he not coming, then?

Olwen's forehead pricked out with cold sweat.

She dropped into the big chair, limp after the strain. And if he did not come, after all?

She sat very still, with wild thoughts chasing through her brain like the race of black clouds in a windstorm.

She watched the clock take its deliberate way to the quarter past and strike; then to the half-hour and strike.

"I shall wait until two," she said grimly.

At two o'clock she went to the garden door to turn the key. But as she stood there she turned it back again. It might be . . . it might be. . . . Somehow one hoped against hope.

She tore the sheet of paper with the message into small pieces and threw them into the fireplace. Then, as there seemed to be nothing else to do, she put out the light and went upstairs to bed.

But she left her door open, in case Gwen should . . . No, it was not for Gwen. But suppose he should come and meet Gwen with her candle. . . .

No use thinking.

She lay with her hands clasped at the back of her neck, to ease the pain a little, and her eyes on the door.

Any moment there might be a flash of light. . . .

But when morning came she had not been disturbed.

XXXIII. BUT THINKING WAS USELESS

SHE was up before Gwen and downstairs to find the morning paper. There had been no accident—nothing reported that might account for his absence. She had not supposed there would be; yet it was a relief.

There would be a telegram, of course. Could telegrams be sent from Town on Sunday? She thought so.

But Gwen was wretched with a swollen face: she could help with the housework to keep from too much thinking.

Monday morning early there would be a telegram.

But there was none.

At mid-morning she told Gwen, with sharp resolution, that she was going to take her to the dentist to have the tooth out.

The woman whimpered and shrank, but Olwen had no mercy.

And while the maid was in the chair, breathing heavily to draw in the gas, the mistress was almost running down Meend Street to the Post Office.

She wired only: "Are you ill?"

She almost thought there might be an answer by the time they got home. But there was none. Nor all afternoon.

It was not until Tuesday morning that she herself opened the door to the messenger boy, and made him wait while she read:

"Yes. Better now. Don't worry. Writing."

There would be a letter, then, on Wednesday morning.

But there was not.

Nor on Thursday.

Nor on Friday, when Gwen was packing up her things to leave the next day.

But on Saturday morning there was a small heap of letters by her plate.

Not this—nor this—nor this—but—?

Yes, the same black eccentric hand; lying crookedly by her plate—like any other letter in the world.

She was afraid to open it; and when she did, was even more disturbed. He regretted that he could not come or send word the week before; he repeated the fact that he had been ill, but gave no details; he said that he hoped to come this Saturday about six o'clock, and signed with initials.

Not the wildest imagination could have interpreted this as a love-letter. The only comfort she could find was in trying to believe that there was something she did not know, something that he was coming to make right. But at six o'clock? And he did not know that Gwen would be gone. He did not mean to stay then.

Imagination opened the door to despair, but she closed it again. Not yet. Time enough later.

She busied herself with bills and housekeeping matters, engaged Mrs. Tornabus to come until she could find another maid, saw a weeping Gwen off with her boxes, and still had most of the afternoon on her hands for thinking.

But thinking was useless.

XXXIV. COME AND SEE

WHEN Kingsland arrived at the time he had set, as soon as the door was closed he was greeted with an abandonment as startling as it was rare.

He tried to free himself, apprehensive; but she only laughed: "There's nobody. Gwen's gone."

That needed explanation. When he understood, he said only that he hoped no one had seen him at the door.

"Let them!" cried Olwen. "Who cares?"

She could see that he found her changed; and she found him changed. There was something that crept into the back of her mind and would be a worry when she had time to think about it; but not now—not now.

"Come into the library and tell me all about it," she said.

He followed, with a question which sounded almost resentful: "About what?"

"Your illness."

"Oh, that! Do you want a doctor's report?"

He was plainly annoyed. Why should that have annoyed him?

She knelt by his chair and laid her face against his arm: "No. But I was worried to death."

"You needn't have been. I can take care of myself."

She ignored his irritation: "You're all right now?"

"Yes."

But there was something—something she could not yet find words for.

"Well, if you're all right you're going to have dinner with me here!" she said gaily.

He did not look pleased—made excuses, none of which was valid. He had left his car, it seemed, at the "Bird in Hand," and was not going to stop the night. He had not told Mrs. Prickett he was coming.

In all this she saw that her fears had not been unreasonable; but she put them aside with a desperate feeling that, disregarded, they might vanish. She would have her way about his staying for dinner.

To his protests she said: "It's nothing but chops and a salad; and the salad is ready. I shouldn't be ten minutes. To please me?"

He assented, mainly by dropping back in his chair with a puzzling weariness.

Yet, ten minutes later, as she was making ready to grill the chops, he was standing at the kitchen door, his voice and manner suddenly gay. "Can you grill chops properly?" he challenged her.

"No," she admitted. "Come and do them yourself."

To her amazement he came; and in a moment was raking out the coals to their whitest heat, calling for a toasting-fork—since she had no grill—for salt, for pepper, demanding hot plates, sending her to the cupboard for sauces. . . .

She forgot her forebodings in the intimate delight of the moment.

With a sudden memory, she caught his arm as he sat before the fire with the last chop: "Listen! There's some very special wine in the cellar. I'm not sure whether it's Tokay. My father kept it for"—no, she could not tell him it was for her marriage—"for a momentous occasion. I'm not likely to have a more momentous occasion than this . . ."

She spoke lightly, only half meaning what she said. If she had known that just then—in the moment that had just

slipped by—lay the turning of her life! But she did not know; and if she had known, she could not have told what would hang upon her words; and if she had understood that, she could not have spoken differently. The inevitable ordering of events—call it Chance, call it Fate, call it God. . . .

He spoke as lightly as she: "Why not? Wait a minute, and I'll carry the candle."

They stumbled about the dark cellar like children, found the dusty bottle and carried it up in triumph.

So there they were in the dining-room with the blinds drawn almost down to keep out the light, and a pair of candles lighted on each side of the low bowl of Spanish irises between them. And he sat in her father's place.

"It will come out," her mind was singing, its fears all forgotten. "It will come out somehow."

And just then he had poured the Tokay and was holding his glass to meet hers: "To us!"

"It will come out; it will come out somehow."

And afterward there were the things to clear away. She would have left them until morning; but he insisted that she must wash up, like a good housewife, and that he would help her.

It was strange enough to see him methodically wiping plates, with a cigarette dangling between his lips.

When everything was put away and Pillicock had been settled at his supper it was time for lighting lamps.

"What next?" asked Olwen.

"This"—he drew her down upon his knee.

They were aroused by a faint protest from Pillicock. He was looking up with scandalised eyes.

"Lucky for us cats can't talk," said Kingsland.

"I shouldn't care," said Olwen.

"Reckless you're getting, almost reckless enough to—to smoke a cigarette. Did you ever try? Want one?"

She shook her head: "Why should I?"

"Well, for one reason, so that I could watch you. You've got a pretty hand, Olwen, quite pretty enough to smoke with."

"Give me, then; I'll try." He gave her the one he had just lighted for himself; and as he lighted another, observed: "Then, for another reason, if I should ever come here again I should be able to smoke myself."

That she did not like so well, but she said only: "I couldn't do it here; the women don't."

"It's common enough in London."

It flashed across her mind that she would never be living in London. She laid down the cigarette.

"Don't you like it?"

"Not much. I'll try again some time."

Pillicock, who had been having a thorough scrub on the hearth, now came back, evidently adjusted to the situation, and plainly asked for an invitation to the unoccupied knee.

Olwen told him to go away; but Kingsland indicated that he might come if he liked. And he came.

"There's a big sandy-haired chap who lives with my housekeeper. I call him Rabelais—he looks like a picture I have of that disreputable prelate. He comes up to visit me now and then. If the door happens to be ajar he opens it; if not he rattles the knob, and I let him in. He's a person of much intelligence—goes straight to the softest rug I have and settles down to think. I know very well why he comes. My housekeeper has a tongue and a husband; there's no peace in the kitchen. So he comes up to me. And as he has too much sense to press his affection on me when I'm not wanting it . . . What's the matter?"

"You might not be wanting it now," whispered Olwen, trying to get away.

His answer was so violent that it rocked Pillicock's founda-

tion. With a cat oath, he jumped off and went away to sulk on the window-sill.

"Couldn't you—stay with me all night—this one time?" asked Olwen.

He drew away from her, leaning back in his chair with a frown: "No. In fact when I came down I didn't intend to stay as long as this."

No news in that, no news in that. But why not? Would she never know?

"But now?"

"I still don't intend to; but I'm going to—a little longer."

"It would be quite safe," she urged. "The hotel people wouldn't know. . . ."

"In this little place? . . . Why do you want me to stay all night?"

"I should like—we might want to talk in the dawn," she faltered.

He laughed, rather jeeringly: "Talk in the dawn! Good Lord! I'm always asleep. You are romantic!"

"Romantic—to want to talk then? We never could before. It seems to me we are missing the most precious—to be able to love and to talk. . . ." She was breathless with the effort to say this.

His brusqueness hurt a little: "No. The talking will keep for the present. And I must get back to the inn well before midnight—to avoid another kind of talk."

"Oh, well," she said.

She went away from him soon after and stood by the fern-filled fireplace, twisting her fingers in a foolish desire to try again to make him understand. Yet it was not long before she went behind his chair, laid a hand on each shoulder and her face against his hair: "I'm going up now. Are you coming?"

He tried in vain to look into her face; she held him fast as

he was. "Your voice is different. What has happened to you?" he asked, getting free then and turning.

She gave herself utterly in her kiss.

"You've changed . . ."

"Come and see."

XXXV. THEIR OWN WAY

DOWNSTAIRS again in the library, she bit back the question that cried in her brain, "Have I pleased you? Are you satisfied?" Aloud she said: "It's not yet eleven."

"No, but it's quite late enough for this village. Good-night."

She could not stop the hysterical "Oh!" that thrilled her from head to foot.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I—you're going back tomorrow, of course?"

"Yes." He was suddenly affectionate: "You have changed."

Again that insistent question, but to ask it would spoil everything. "For the better, I hope," she said. "I'm growing." She wondered if he had forgotten her desperate vow of a fortnight before that she would make herself over.

"You're more, even, than I dreamed before I had you," he said.

Perhaps it was worth while to have lived to hear that.

"You really wanted me tonight, or you're the gayest little deceiver who ever cheated a man in love."

"Do I look like a deceiver?" she challenged.

"I don't know. If you are, you're too good at it to be caught."

"I'm not," she said quietly. "Not deceiving you, I mean."

"In that case, I'll be going."

She dropped his arm: "You couldn't—you'd rather not—say—when you'll be coming again?"

He dropped into a chair as if overcome by a sudden weakness; and he spoke words strange enough to her ears: "There we are, up against it!"

"It's only"—she tried to explain—"now that Gwen's gone, I've got to get another maid. They'll never let me go on like this. . . ."

Apparently he had not heard: "You threw me off my base, you know."

"Well, but I thought . . ." She could not go on; she did not know what was in his mind.

"It'll have to be thought about, worked out," he said at last, grimly. "We can't do it tonight. . . . I'll come back tomorrow—for a few minutes only. It will be safer at this time of night to go out through the garden?"

She nodded: "But there'll hardly be anybody."

He seized her once more, with a kind of triumph that startled: "We've had it—haven't we?—the world's best! Life, isn't it? Who cares what happens?"

"Not I!" she responded; and at the moment the words rang true.

Later, in the empty house, in the bed that seemed so empty, the wild glow chilled and ceased as if it had never been.

She tried to find comfort in his parting words: "The world's best"—"Life, isn't it?" . . . Through the whole incredible experience—so sweet, so blinding, so thought-shattering—there had remained in the recesses of the mind a watcher in the darkness, who said—who said nothing, who sat with all her face covered but her eyes, and watched. . . .

"I must be a little mad," she thought. "It can't be that every one has thoughts like these."

If tonight was the best, what was beyond?

She seemed suddenly to see before her shut eyes the two glasses of golden wine and to hear his "To us!"

Of course, that was something beyond—something of a united life. . . .

And then—only then—flashed into consciousness the vague trouble that had not found words: the strangeness she had felt when he first came was not a matter of nerves, but of a thing she had refused to name; and upon that she had offered him wine—the wine saved for her wedding day.

Well, but?

Things came out; but they had their own way of it—their own way. . . .

XXXVI. BUT WHERE?

SHE busied herself the next morning with the household duties occasioned by Gwen's departure.

When she washed up the breakfast things her eyes were bright with unshed tears, as she remembered the night before.

It was impossible that things should come out right!

But she ordered her room and the house, and gave Pillicock his special Sunday brushing. She went out into the garden to get flowers, and made herself look at what had happened there since the day before. One must go through these daily motions, or life would be impossible.

He would not come in the morning, of course. She might have gone to church in perfect assurance, if she had liked; but she so rarely went, these last months, that the Vicar had called especially to remonstrate.

She watched the people on their way to service; she watched them return with the cheerful consciousness of duty performed and dinner to come.

She had her solitary meal and cleared away.

Then, going through the hall, she wrung her hands in a sudden despair: "My life is all waiting, waiting."

She sat at the drawing-room window, watching the birds busy in the coppice across the road. Pillicock watched them, too.

She saw the people go by to evening service. . . .

If she could have got word to him; if she could have found out how things were; if she could have gone to him, it

wouldn't have been so bad. But this waiting—and waiting—and waiting. . . .

An old man was coming slowly along the other side of the road in the dusk.

He crossed the road and looked at the window where she sat. An old man? It was he.

She opened the door without a word; he laid down his hat without a word. So they went into the library, now shadowy in the twilight.

To break the silence, she asked whether she should light the lamp; and he said that he must be going in a few moments.

It seemed many before he spoke again: "I'm driving back tonight—at least to Gloucester."

What comment did he expect on that?

"About—us," he said. "I've been thinking and drinking and sleeping on it—had to sleep this afternoon, to get over the effects of the other two. . . . Oh, don't you worry! I'm quite all right now. The point is, I might have spared myself the pains: I've come out exactly where I went in when I made up my mind this week, before I came down. There's nothing for it but to face the whole truth—do you hear?—the whole truth."

"I'm willing," she said.

"You think you are." He might have spared the sneer. But, then, he was not quite right, for all his saying so—he had not entirely got over the effects of . . .

"About last week now, that's a good place to begin. If you must know why I didn't come down . . ."

"You are unfair," she said. "I haven't asked. . . ."

He paid no attention: "If you must know—and it is evident that you must—that woman came back. . . ."

No need to tell her name, no need.

"I couldn't get rid of her, the crazy fool! She came on a Saturday, and by the time I'd got her out of my place . . ."

"I see," said Olwen.

"Oh, you've no reason to be jealous! I never had anything to do with her; but she wouldn't let go. See? She drove me. . . ."

Yes, "drove" was the word they always used, she thought.

He changed his tone: "I'm not apologising, you know. I'm only trying to make you see. . . . On Saturday I couldn't get away; on Sunday I wasn't fit to. So there you have it. I was pretty well all the week getting clear and finding myself. . . ."

He waited for her comment. And she could think of nothing to say but "I'm very sorry. . . ."

"Damn your pity!" he interrupted fiercely. "I don't want it. I want you to see."

"Well, see what?"

"That the sooner you cut loose from me the better for you; and that's the truth."

She was silent; but her silence only irritated him.

"Oh, you don't? You women! You can do anything under the sun for a man but give him up."

She tried to say "Even that"; but her lips made no sound.

He went on more reasonably: "You see, we can't go on like this, my dear."

"No." But perhaps he did not hear.

"These are the facts." He drew his chair to the table and with his forefinger went through the motions of laying them, one by one, on the polished surface. She watched as if hypnotised.

"First, I'm a Kingsland—with all that means."

"Rotten! rotten!" The words were like an echo of something heard long before.

"Second, I've been through the War; and it's done me no good."

"Do you mean," asked Olwen, in a voice that she kept quite steady, "that you're diseased?"

He looked at her straight: "No, not as you mean, or I hope I should have kept away. Not now; not for a long . . ."

She lost the end of his sentence, suddenly remembering how two years ago he had come to consult her father.

The next she heard was: ". . . but I'm rotten stuff all right, fit for the rubbish heap."

She came back with a sharpness that surprised herself: "That's where we all go."

"True, wise little dove—oh, most wise dove!" he laughed—she wished he wouldn't; not like that—"but not till we're dead."

"Your words don't mean anything to me!" she cried passionately.

And he: "That was what I feared."

He went on: "Third, if we go on like this, there'll be trouble, as sure as we're both alive, even if . . ."

"Even if what?"

He was silent.

"I shouldn't mind anything if I could be of use, if I could help! That hurts most."

"That's the woman of it. . . . Well, you can't. How could you?"

"Could any one?"

"You can answer that question."

"But you yourself . . . ?"

He said with cold annoyance: "You don't suppose I want to go to the dogs, do you? I do the best I can. But at times . . ."

Yes, of course, that was the way of it.

"Fourth," he said, with his pointing forefinger.

"Don't," she pleaded, trying to draw it from the table. "I can't stand any more."

But he pushed her away: "Why not? There are many more. You ought to know them."

"I've got enough—more than enough for a lifetime," she said, trying vainly to control her voice.

Suddenly he yielded the point, flung himself back in his chair, and said: "Well, take the others for granted, then. Make 'em as bad as you like. What are we going to do about it?"

The small flash of comfort in the "we"—so small, but indubitably there.

But she could not find an answer.

"If I don't come again . . ."

Only her eyes spoke.

"You see," he said.

"If we go on you'll have to pay. Perhaps it's too late. Till last night, I kept my head. But last night you were so . . ."

"My fault, then," she whispered.

If he heard, he did not deny it; but when she added, "Then let me pay," he said, "I can't do that."

Out of the deep bitterness in which she seemed to be drowning, she said: "Oh, why not? It's the easiest way."

He gripped her wrist so that she shrank with the pain: "Don't talk like that. I'll not stand irony."

She looked at him, startled: "But I wasn't ironical. I meant it."

"You meant it? You meant you could go through—the whole business alone?"

"If necessary," she answered. "But it mightn't be."

He dropped her wrist. She rubbed it to ease the pain.

"And we can't be married," he continued, as if to himself.

"No," she assented. "You say not."

He got to his feet, leaning towards her and trying to see her averted face in the shadows: "But you? What should you

say, if you had your choice? After all this, what should you say, eh?"

"I can't answer that," she said, as he waited.

"But you would, eh? You would?"

She looked at him: "You know."

"Then, by God, you shall! Damn the Fates!"

He had her hand and was trying to drag her to her feet.

"What do you mean? Please let me go," she pleaded.

"I mean what I say. If you want to be married to me, get your hat. Now!"

She pulled her hand free: "Please go away. It wouldn't be fair. You're in no state. . . ."

"State! What do you mean? Do you think I'm drunk? Get your hat!"

"Drunk or not," she said, with some spirit, "you'd repent tomorrow."

"Tomorrow be damned!" he said. "Get your hat. Or are you coming without?"

"Coming where?" she asked, dazed.

"To Gloucester—with me—now."

That was clear enough.

She took him by the arm: "Come to the window a moment. I can't see you." She looked into his eyes: they were reddened, muddy, but met hers straight enough: "Anthony," she said, "do you know what you are talking about?"

Her face and neck were being covered with hot kisses; and his breath . . .

She pulled herself away: "You don't know what you are talking about," she said.

"The devil I don't! I made you a sporting offer, and if you don't take it now . . ."

Never again. That was certain. But was it fair to take it? Dare she take it? She must try again: "But you always said . . . and now when you're not quite—yourself. . . ."

"I'm not so drunk as that. I'm sober enough to mean what I say. Are you going to get your hat or not?"

Here was a strange new life knocking—knocking—knocking at her door, and no time to . . . oh, no time for anything; but she must have nodded, for he pulled out his watch: "I'll have the car here in half an hour."

When the door closed upon him she sat down on the stairway, trembling so that she could not stand. Pillicock came and tugged at her skirt: he had not had his supper.

Of course, he would not come back. There was no reason in the world for supposing he would come back; but if he should—she must at least pretend to get ready.

She gave Pillicock his cream; then went upstairs and as fast as she could for her trembling, made preparations, packed a small bag with such things as she could think of, and crept down again, almost stifled with the beating of her pulses.

And what should she do with her poor little cat?

She found a scrap of paper, wrote a hasty note to Mrs. Tornabus, saying she had been called away unexpectedly on business and did not know when she would return. Would Mrs. Tornabus lure the cat from the garden and care for him well? She had just pinned the note to the kitchen table —fortunately the woman had the key to the back door—and had caught up her small grey shadow for a last frantic squeeze before tumbling it among the daffodils, when she heard the rumble and grate of a car stopping outside.

He had come, then: he had actually come. And she was afraid to open the door.

But somehow she did so; and stood on the steps with her bag, shivering in the May breeze, while he muttered something about lights.

The lights were on. Without a word, he came and took her bag and helped her to the place by his side.

There was no one on the road. But evening service must be

nearly over. They would be meeting people all the way. What matter for that? Everybody would know tomorrow that she was gone, and sometime they would know how.

He pulled his cap low over his eyes and looked at her sideways: "Well, is the word *go?*"

"Go," she said.

But where?

XXXVII. THE COURTYARD OF AN OLD-FASHIONED INN

VERY quietly the car picked up the road, at first between the hedges with here and there a light, and shadowy figures in twos and threes; then the turn at the bottom and the swift plunge down the hill with the tall elms closing in overhead.

It seemed to Olwen, who had rarely been in a car before, as if her soul had got free from her body and was sweeping on exultant wings through the darkness. There was only enough breeze to make ribbons and loose things flutter and to set up a pleasant little singing in the ears.

After the plunge, the slow climb, under trees, through the open, with the memory, rather than the shadows, of great hills to the left; and at far distances a twinkling light or two —or were they stars?

So plunging, so climbing, with all the dark road clear before them until they swung into the flats by the wide river.

More speed, and still more speed; and never a word spoken by either.

The wide still river under the early stars. . . .

Newenham Church, with its heavy clipped yews and its solid tower; Newenham streets, with glimmering lights gone almost before they were seen.

There a faint blur of thought crossed her mind: If they should be stopped for speeding—strange they were not stopped; but who could stop them . . . ?

She gave up again to the exultation of the night.

She did not feel afraid. When the high stone walls rushed at them, closing in fast, she would have a sharp glimpse of a wreck—and laugh to herself.

On the main highway they began to meet other cars, and to pass them; for none went so fast as they. Many a quick swerve saved them from a smash or the ditch; and though Olwen's heart leaped to her mouth, she laughed and said nothing.

It was not until they could see the first lights of Gloucester that Kingsland slowed up, and turned to ask: "Did you like that?"

She answered only with a laugh.

Then—they were running quietly now—"Have you remembered that it's Sunday?"

She had not thought of it for hours. Nor had he, he said. He added: "It means that we can't get a J.P. till tomorrow."

"But what shall we do?" The wings of her spirit drooped and fell. Would it come to nothing after all? Probably.

"Do? We'll call today tomorrow, that's all. We'll go to an inn where nobody knows either of us. And tomorrow we'll—as they say—make it all right. What's the difference?"

That was, of course, the only sensible way. One deception more or less. . . .

He steered carefully in and out among the promenading Sunday-evening crowds, inquisitive as to arrivals, and through a gateway into the courtyard of an old-fashioned inn.

XXXVIII. SHE DID NOT DISTURB HIM

AS THE boy opened the door of the room assigned to them, the one thing Olwen noticed was the long white curtains blowing gently in and out in the breeze.

Kingsland threw his cap on the table and sat down with a sigh, obviously worn out. "Well"—he attempted a laugh—"we've the night before us. What shall we do with it?"

Olwen went to the window and looked out. Creepers everywhere and flower-pots in the courtyard below. Very pretty. "What should you do if you were alone?" she asked.

Instead of answering, he said: "We might have gone on to Town, I suppose. Only about a hundred and twenty miles. But I thought you'd be too tired. We shouldn't have got there before midnight."

No comment seemed to be needed on that.

"How about dinner?"

"I'm not hungry," she began, but changed quickly to, "But of course we should have it. You must be hungry."

"No," he said.

There was a silence in which the soft noise of the blowing curtains could be heard.

What in heaven's name was there to talk about? Not the weather or the view from the window or tomorrow or plans or love-making—least of all, love-making to that impassive figure in the chair. Yet somehow it seemed to be her business to find things to say. She was panic-stricken.

He reached for his cap at last: "I'll go down and see . . ."

He went out without ending his sentence.

Waiting again. But she had waited so often.

She took off her hat and coat, washed away the dust of the journey, and made herself tidy before he should come back for her to go down to dinner.

It was perhaps too late; she looked at her watch. They might go out somewhere, but unless there was a foreign restaurant . . . It was Sunday.

She walked about the room, pretending an interest in the wall-paper, in the old-fashioned colour prints on the walls, in the courtyard below. But suddenly she felt very tired and faint. She ought to have something—hot milk would do—to make her sleep. She could ring for it, of course. But any moment he might come back, and it would be awkward explaining. Better wait a little. She wanted to go to bed and sleep—forget everything until tomorrow; tomorrow it would certainly be all right again; but not in this room—alone. And there was no getting from this room now.

At last she drew a chair up to the window, where she could feel the breeze, and sat looking down into the courtyard. But nobody came or went for a long time.

When the door opened suddenly and the curtains flapped against her face she almost screamed. Some one had stumbled against a chair in the dark, was fumbling for the light.

She flew to turn it on.

"What were you sitting in the dark for?" said Kingsland in a thick voice.

His eyes—his face—yes.

"I—I didn't know what else to do," she faltered. She did not wish to remind him. Well, he had not said he was going to see about dinner.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and began to unfasten one shoe: "It's late. *I'm* going to bed." His tone implied that she had refused to do so.

He had a bad time with a knot in the shoelace, swearing under his breath.

"Can't I? Let me . . ." She would have knelt.

"Get away," he said angrily. "I'm not too drunk to do it."

She went back to her chair by the window.

After a long time she ventured to look. He was in bed, with his clothes tumbled about over the floor.

She crossed the room noiselessly; gathered them up and folded them carefully.

"I don't mind," she was saying to herself. "I don't mind a bit. I couldn't have expected anything else, under the circumstances."

She stood looking down upon him, twisting and untwisting her fingers in her fashion when disturbed.

He was breathing heavily and seemed to be asleep; but whether her look awakened him or not, he opened his eyes, stared a second, gave a momentary glint of a smile, and closed them again.

She knelt by him, with one arm about his head: "Listen a minute, dear. Anything I can get you?"

She felt his head move slightly in a negative.

"Nothing to eat?"

The negative was more pronounced.

"You're all right?"

A restless movement which she took to mean "Let me be."

She went back to her window, uncertain whether to go to bed at once or whether to try to get some food for the dragging faintness. To ring now . . . and how could she keep the waiter out of the room? To go downstairs . . . but it was after ten o'clock. She might have tea in the lounge; but there would be people; perhaps some she knew. She could not—no! Better to go to bed at once. But the thought of a wakeful night like this was intolerable. She must escape—yes, *escape* was the word that had slipped into her mind—if only to draw

a breath. She must get out and find some food and think a little before facing the night. He was safe enough . . .

Yes, *safe* was the word, she thought. And she knew then that all the way she had been afraid and had laughed because of her fear. All her exultation had been tied to the keenest sense that any moment might bring death to them both. . . .

She slipped noiselessly into her outdoor things, paused at the door for a backward look, turned out the light, and fled down the stairs.

He was safe up there, safe for the night.

By good fortune there was no one in the little office downstairs and no one in the hall. In a second she was outside, walking swiftly without aim.

The streets were nearly deserted—an occasional pedestrian, and here and there in dark entries and alleys a pair of lovers. It was a night for courting.

The faintness again. To be sure she had lived upon little but emotions that day. There must be some place where she could get milk or food.

Without noticing, she had come to the edge of the town. There was an open space with a tent or two, a merry-go-round, but empty and silent, keeping the Sabbath.

By the roadside, however, there was a stall, a man within in white cap and apron. A giggling couple stood there, sharing a bottle of lemonade. She asked the man if he had any milk.

"Milk, Miss?" He stared, then shook his head. "But ginger ale, lemonade, sandwiches, buns. . . ."

She asked for a bun.

"Which kind?" he demanded, and she pointed to the nearest.

"Two for a penny," he said. So she took two and paid her penny.

With her packet in hand she set off down the nearest road.

Both the stall-keeper and his customers stared curiously after her.

In the clear, starry night she could see the road plainly, though the hedges were black. She was not in the least afraid, and she did not in the least know where she was going or whether she would ever return to the hotel.

She began to eat one of the buns. It tasted intolerably of saffron; she made herself eat it, and was no longer faint. But she was very tired. If she could only sit down somewhere to rest and think before going back, or away, whichever it was to be. It was strange enough to be thinking this when one had come so far; but the thought was there.

There were no walls—only hedges. One could not sit down in the dusty road; and the grass was heavy with dew.

She went on and on, from sheer inertia; stopped with a catch of breath as she came to a crouching white figure under the hedge. Then she laughed; it was only an old milestone. On this she could sit and eat the other saffron bun and decide what to do.

Perched there under an overhanging holly, munching a most dry and stale saffron bun, she laughed to herself rather hysterically.

There was no one on the road. If she had wanted solitude for her thinking . . . she was alone in the arms of night; and above were the lonely stars.

But that, of course, was *it*. That was the way of it—one was alone, always alone. If one could understand that and bear it, one had made a beginning, one could begin to live. Each star in its own course; each body in its own cells, cut off—oh, never more than in the intimacies of love!—from every other. Nothing to do but grow. Grow how? Grow to what? Could one answer those questions, sitting alone in the night under the chilly stars?

But if that was all there was to it, there was another side:

one had one's self. One had at least that; and it was everything one had. . . . So to be unhappy was to spoil one's own little world, all one had. Nobody else could know. It wasn't worth while to be unhappy.

Sitting alone on an old milestone, under the starry cloak of night, and sprinkled and pricked by the holly, Olwen made her discovery. One didn't have to be unhappy. There was nothing to be unhappy about if one never had anything but one's self, and that couldn't be taken away. . . . It didn't seem very much to have, measured by the pin-pricks up there that were stars, immeasurably greater than the sun, and the sun, unimaginably greater than the speck of the earth. But one wasn't responsible for the little one had—not more than the trees. They had only to grow as they could; she had only to grow as she could. If a tree could not grow for the blocking of a great stone, it turned another way. But it never grew backward. It couldn't shrink back into itself and be smaller. It had to go on growing, not knowing why or where. That was the way of it. One had to go on and on and take whatever came—not try to make it come, but accept it, grow by it . . . and not be unhappy. Whatever came, not be unhappy. . . .

She rose from her milestone. The May breeze was chilly now. If it had been daylight, or even moonlight, perhaps she might have read on the stone how many miles to Gloucester, and how many miles backward on the way to the old life. But in the darkness she could not see; and she was not returning now. . . . It was worth much to have learned that.

She ran through the night along the dusty road and dimly-lighted streets. . . . In the hall there was no one but an astonished night porter.

She opened the bedroom door without a sound, and without turning on the light, crept to the bed.

He was breathing lightly, evidently asleep.

In the darkness she undressed and laid away her clothes, and brushed and braided her long hair.

The chill wind moved the curtains so that they flapped a little; but she did not lower the window. Shivering, she crept into her side of the bed and lay very still. But he must have unconsciously moved nearer, for his sleeve brushed her face. She caught it and laid her cheek against it, so quietly that she did not disturb him.

XXXIX. THE FOURTH FATE

IN THE blue-grey dawn the four Fates were dancing together. It was odd that those old women should be dancing. But perhaps they were not so old as they were painted. Perhaps they had imperishable youth. More likely. Their white draperies hid their faces; but there was slender Clotho with her spindle, and motherly Lachesis pulling out the thread, and Atropos with her shears, stretching out a claw, like an old cat, and—who was the fourth Fate? There must be a fourth, for there she was dancing with her sisters. But what was her name, what was it? Was there a Fate who only stood by and laughed at the foolishness of mortals? . . .

The misty figures slowly loosened their intertwined arms and resolved themselves into long white window curtains.

It was pleasant to lie there and watch them moving softly in the breeze, while the blue light changed into the white of day.

Not to think: there was nothing to think about. All the thinking had been done the night before. One was safe—for the moment, safe; and one had but the moment to live in . . . only one's self and the moment. . . .

She wondered, idly, how he would awaken and what he would say, this first morning they awakened together; but when she heard him move, she wilfully kept her face to the window.

Even when she felt him come close, she did not turn. "How about that early morning talk?" he said.

She moved so that he could slip his arm under her neck: "Talk? I don't want to talk. I'm content."

At that he raised himself to look at her face: "Content? After last night? There's no understanding women. I expected—the devil to pay, this morning."

"Sorry to disappoint you"—rubbing her cheek against his hand.

"That's like a kitten," he said. "I must apologise, I suppose."

And she: "Don't bother."

"There's no excuse. I didn't intend—" He shrugged.

"Of course not."

She looked at him with an odd sense of mental distance between them that she had not felt since the beginning. It was a kind of appraisal going on in her mind. Red-faced, but not coarse, he would never be coarse: the Kingsland blood was riotous but not beastly. His eyes were curious; even this morning, dimmed and a little bloodshot, there was a movement in them, a play of the mind that she would never know —not more than one tree knows another . . . and his rumpled hair was boyishly attractive. . . .

"You are thinking . . . ?" he suggested lightly.

"No"—she shut her eyes against him—"not at all. Far from it."

"Well, I am. I'm thinking we've got to see this thing through."

"You haven't changed your mind—yet?" she asked, her eyes still closed.

"We're going to put it through," he repeated.

She was startled into opening her eyes. There was a certain settling of his chin.

"Not if you're sorry," she said. "It's not too late."

He smiled a little: "I'm not sorry—at the moment. And it is too late."

"Why?"

"Because I've made up my mind."

"But you think it's a mistake?"

He was silent. Then: "I've given up thinking. We're in for it now."

"I can't imagine," she said slowly, "what brought you to—to the change of yesterday."

"My infernal pride, I suppose," was his retort. "I don't enjoy running away from consequences."

"But I won't . . ." She was aflame with protest.

"Yes, you will. Besides, you are very nice. I like you."

She lay down again, with her arms behind her head. "You won't—long," she said, without bitterness, but with conviction.

"You might wait a little. Don't bring me to judgment yet."

"It wasn't judgment; it was prophecy."

"Well, Cassandra, your reasons? You must have reasons."

She felt oddly cool and truthful as she said: "I suppose the world has spoiled you. You're accustomed to do what you please—and that only . . ."

"Well, why not?" he interrupted. "Whose pleasure should I follow if not my own?"

"If pleasure at all," she began; but again he interrupted: "What else? The will of God? Expound it, Cassandra."

She was silent, thinking: It may lie in my own hands whether he goes on loving me or not, whether I want him to or not.

Instead of pressing for an answer, he said: "I'm going to prophesy in turn. I prophesy that first you're going to show me whether you love me enough to be worth bothering about; then we're going to put on our clothes, and pretend, if you like, that they are wedding raiment; then have a respectable British breakfast; then go out and buy a respectable British ring; and then find a respectable British J.P.; and then . . ."

"And then?"

"Why, some sort of honeymoon in Town, I suppose. Or

would you rather go abroad? Either would be—respectable."

"Since you're so bent on respectability, I'd better refuse the first," she said.

"But you won't."

So that was to be the way of it, after all. She looked at the four long white curtains. Certainly Clotho had begun to spin the thread nearly twenty-seven years ago; and certainly Atropos would cut it off, ten—twenty—who knew how many years ahead? In the meantime it was in the hands of Lachesis, who was drawing it out—no, there was the Fourth Fate—the Nameless One—standing by to snatch it from her hands, to colour it, to intertwine it with other threads, to snatch it, and lose it, and snatch it again, to make it lovely or ugly. . . . In the hands of Lachesis it was no more than the bare thread of life. It was the Fourth Fate who had the shaping of it; and the Fourth Fate was not nameless. That was where one's self came in.

XL. THEY MOUTHED IT OVER

IT WAS Mrs. Tornabus who received the first telegram. She painfully spelled out the words and sat down heavily. There was news indeed!

Pillicock hovered near. It was his breakfast hour; but he did not venture to interrupt. Mrs. Tornabus had a broad, flat hand.

"No," she said to the messenger boy, who was kicking his heels against the kitchen scraper and whistling to pass the time, as he waited to see whether there would be a reply. "No, Yedward, there ain't nothing to say to this." She wasn't going to let him have the spreading of the news.

She laboured out with it to Wagtail, who was transplanting autumn gillyflowers.

"What do you say to that?" She held out the brown sheet of paper.

He slowly straightened himself, found his spectacle case, and with an earthy finger traced out the letters. Then he folded his brass-rimmed spectacles and put them away before he said, his old eyes dimming with tears: "God be praised for that!"

"But when did they do the cartin'?" asked Mrs. Tornabus. "That's what beats me. I'll just be going to market. I'll maybe meet with a bit o' news there."

She laboured away for her bonnet and shawl and her market-basket. The passing on of the news now would be no slower than her heavy footsteps.

Yet it had preceded her at the Vicarage. The Vicar himself had had a telegram, little later than the first. He dropped his sermon and went to his wife in her sewing-room: "My dear, here's strange news!"

"And a good thing for her, too," she said emphatically, and flipped the message with her thimble.

"Good for him, perhaps," said the Vicar doubtfully. "He's always seemed to me a bird of passage. Now perhaps he'll settle down."

"There'll be talk," said Mrs. Cheriton. "I wonder if the Uncle and Aunt know?"

"Sure to; this comes from London.

"Well, how did it all happen?" asked Mrs. Cheriton. "That's what people will want to know. She hasn't been away; and he hasn't been here, to speak of."

He was wondering whether they would live in the old house, and whether he would do it up, and whether . . .

Then she had an idea: "My dear! You remember that Sunday night—a fortnight ago, wasn't it, or three weeks?—that big car. Mangott's wife was telling me. She said it looked like Olwen; the man had his cap pulled down so she couldn't see him well. And it was the day after, that Olwen was said to have gone up to Town on business. We thought it odd that no one saw her at the train. It was an elopement, that's what it was."

"Oh, well," said the Vicar, "if they're married. We must be lenient, my dear. These hot-headed young folks. . . ."

"I shouldn't call Anthony Kingsland exactly young," she objected.

"Well, he's probably hot-headed, being of that race—a bad lot, as I've said before. I hope he'll make her happy."

"The best thing she could do," said Mrs. Cheriton, "in fact, the only thing, now that Jack Winter's gone and got himself engaged to that girl in London. . . . I wonder when

their wedding will be? . . . There wasn't anybody else for Olwen."

"Young Gibbs?" ventured the Vicar. "I sometimes thought . . ."

"Gibbs? But he's impossible!"

"He's a good doctor. Look how he pulled the Cripping baby through diphtheria. And a good fellow."

"That may be; but not for Olwen. You've got to remember that she's a Bream."

"With a pedigree that goes back to Caradoc, eh? And he's a Kingsland, with the lands that Henry VIII gave his forefathers, eh? It seems suitable enough if you could measure human beings by the stock they come of."

So from the Vicarage and from Sailwell the two streams of news trickled all over the village, met and parted and came together again, enriched with many small streams from other fountains.

What went on there was precisely as Olwen could imagine; she had wanted to get the first excitement over before they returned. It would be bad enough at best.

Mrs. Holloway hinted to her husband that some one had said that she saw . . . In fact, there were frantic efforts to explain how it was that the village knew nothing of the courtship.

"Tush!" said Holloway rudely, though Miss Willey and Miss Moore were there at tea. "Stuff and nonsense! Nobody saw anything of the sort. And ye'd best keep to yourselves all that kind of rubbish. Time enough later to find out all ye need to know!"

Of course, Holloway would talk that way, being the keeper of so many men's secrets.

But the three women went out and repeated it all, with Holloway's comments—and more than he said.

Miss Willey called in Dr. Gibbs. She lived in frequent expectation of appendicitis.

"It's that lump, you know, Doctor, come again. There."

"Not in the right place," said Gibbs gruffly, in no good temper because of the gossip that met him everywhere on his rounds.

"But it's there," she insisted. "Feel."

He felt the spot indicated, but said nothing.

"Well, if you can't feel it, *I* can," said Miss Willey, with dignity. "I know very well I shall die of it some day."

"It wouldn't be a bad thing to die of," said Gibbs. "You've got to die of something, you know. I suppose"—he turned to the ever-present Miss Moore—"ye've been reading about"—he named a prominent writer who had been operated on successfully for appendicitis. "That's one of the curses of newspapers."

Miss Willey was not resentful, but she was hurt: "I happened to see the account, that's all. I don't look for such things. Gladys will tell you, I had just said to her I wondered whether there would be any mention of Miss Bream's marriage in the *Post* when my eye hit upon it. . . ."

Everywhere he went—everywhere—there was a dragging in of Miss Bream's marriage. Now that it was over, why couldn't they let it alone?

"I suppose you don't know any more about it?" asked one of the women; he was really too perturbed to know which.

"About what?" he asked irritably.

"About Olwen Bream's . . ."

"No. I don't. I know nothing. For that reason I don't talk about it." It was the snub direct.

Miss Willey returned to her symptoms, and he was forced to prescribe a bottle of harmless stuff to make her content to pay his bill; he did not trouble himself about the flavour.

But the women would not let alone the topic that bothered

him. Even while he wrote the prescription, Gladys Moore continued: "It's certainly a funny thing that a quiet, well-behaved girl like that should suddenly elope. . . ."

He was folding the prescription paper: "How do you know she eloped?" he demanded.

"They say . . ."

He got up and jingled his watch-chain and seals—rather too heavy, rather too showy for a doctor: "They say—they say—that the devil has horns and a tail. But I don't believe it." He went out abruptly.

Miss Willey was distressed about his last remark: "Really, my dear, I sometimes think Dr. Gibbs is a little—well, vulgar."

But Miss Moore said: "And I think he was in love with her himself."

That was something to chew upon and digest.

They mouthed it over.

XLI. A STRANGE HOME-COMING

IN HER telegram Olwen had mentioned the day of their return; also, that they would probably come by road. On that day human nature at Lydwell found many ingenious excuses for keeping an eye on the London road. But by evening the word had gone about that they had not returned. The watch was continued the next day and the next, with the same result. People were beginning to feel aggrieved.

On the fourth day there was a less acute observation, which still would not have missed the approach of a car. But no one thought of the station. The porter was the only person who saw Olwen come back and who had the astounding fact to report that she was alone.

Yes, alone, he had told his mother when he went to his tea, half an hour later. She had four pieces of luggage—all new, not counting her 'at box; and she had stood on the platform while he sent a boy to fetch a taxi. For, as no one was expected, there had been none at the station.

Asked how she looked, he said, much the same.

Asked how she was dressed, he said indignantly, how in tarnation could he be expected to notice a thing like that? The thing that had struck him mainly, he said, was that she had given him a half crown for his extra trouble. That was what.

But various people saw her, by accident, driving from the station to Sailwell. Miss Bird, who happened to be at her door, was put all in a flutter at sight of the pink face that

smiled and bobbed at her from the taxi window. Dr. Gibbs, at sight of the same vision, stopped short and lifted his hat, very red and staring. Mrs. Holloway, whom chance had kindly allowed to be passing the gate of Sailwell when the taxi stopped, had the first kiss and embrace.

"But, my dear child, you haven't brought your husband!" she had gasped; and the bride had laughed, she reported, as gaily as she had ever heard Olwen laugh: "No, so I haven't. I must have lost him somewhere. But he'll turn up all right. You'll see."

It was an odd reply—very, was the general decision. But she had looked happy; and her frock, Mrs. Holloway had reported, was all that could be expected, even of Paris.

So her arrival passed. There was Mrs. Tornabus, stiffly polite, more than a little inquisitive, and on her dignity because of the unexplained delay. There was Wagtail, come to help with the luggage, inarticulate with delight. There was Pillicock, not at all surprised, but condescending to a loud and cheerful purr, the moment he was raised from the ground.

Home again after devious ways. And now she would have to begin to lie. It was a pity that the memory nagged her the moment of her arrival, but so it was. She was on her guard from her first glimpse of Mrs. Holloway.

They let her alone the first few days, not without some discussion as to what the proper length of time was. Various items of news sifted down to the village:

Most important: the husband had not come.

Then: Mrs. Tornabus was leaving, whether because of her bad leg or because of the advertisement in the local paper for a maid, which was one of the bride's first activities.

Then: the fittings of the surgery, such as had not been inherited and transferred to Dr. Gibbs—the village knew all about that—were sent to Dean Hospital.

Then: various country girls were interviewed, and at last a maid was got from Bristol. That was what even a short visit to parts abroad did to one, was repeated, not without indignation. These city ways; and, of course, with a husband from there . . .

By this time Mrs. Cheriton thought it was permissible for her, as an old friend, to call. The brisk new maid showed her in, and Olwen steeled herself to the lying.

"My dearest child!" Any other woman would have wept; but Mrs. Cheriton merely looked as if she could have wept if she had liked. "Now tell me all about it," she urged.

Olwen turned her head to signify that tea was to be brought, then: "All right. What do you wish to hear first?"

"What we simply can't imagine, my dear, is how you came to do it that way! Why didn't you let us know?"

"Because I didn't know myself—until half an hour before," said Olwen.

"Well, but when and where and how?" Mrs. Cheriton was so obviously all ears that the girl could have laughed in her face. To deceive her was another matter. She began a generalised account. . . .

"That was on Sunday, wasn't it?" interrupted Mrs. Cheriton sharply.

No use denying that. They were probably seen. Yes, as it turned out, they had been seen.

"And where did you spend the night?"

Quickness was the whole thing: "Canon Wainwright," she began.

Mrs. Cheriton clasped her hands: "I see—I see."

But Olwen had remembered that the Canon was an old busybody and that he often came to Lydwell.

"No, you don't," she said, rather rudely. "I thought of him; but we didn't go there. Anthony—my husband—insisted upon our keeping on to London."

This miserable lying! And suppose some of the Lydwell

people went to Gloucester and stopped at that same hotel, and turned back the leaves of the book? Well, it had to be chanced now. She was committed to London.

"That was better," Mrs. Cheriton tried to be helpful. "And he took you to your uncle's in Gower Street, of course."

Olwen hesitated. That was the best story, of course; but suppose her people came down for a visit, as they might well do? She looked under her chair: "Pillicock? I thought I heard the cat." She went to the door, and, luckily, he was in waiting. He made a good screen.

"My uncle's? At that time of night? How could we? No, Mr. Kingsland left me at a hotel and went on to his rooms. . . ."

"A hotel? At that time of night?"

"Oh, it wasn't so late as all that. It wasn't midnight—I think. I mean it wasn't at all late for a London hotel. It was, for people like my aunt, you know."

Pillicock was invaluable.

"You didn't—you weren't married in church?" asked Mrs. Cheriton.

"No." Olwen stumbled on to, "It would have taken so long," and stopped, with a burning face. They would think what they pleased without hint from her. "We went to a J.P.," she ended lamely.

There was a silence. "Your poor father!" sighed Mrs. Cheriton.

But that was not fair! Olwen bit her lip: "He would have understood."

Mrs. Cheriton thought it wise to change the subject: "And you went for your honeymoon . . . ?"

"To Paris," said Olwen.

Then she could talk freely and somehow that particular ordeal was at an end.

But there were others, day after day. Sometimes they went off easily. Mrs. Holloway and Mrs. Cole came together and

were so readily diverted into outcries over the new Paris clothes that Olwen had only to make an exhibition of them, with scarcely any fibs at all.

"You had to buy them all after the wedding, of course," said Mrs. Cole.

"Yes," said Olwen. "With my own money." She wanted that understood.

But it was a long time before she could get clear. She remembered, not without bitterness, how she had rebelled in advance against the lies that would have to be told. "Then you had better learn," he had observed drily. "If everybody told the whole truth all the time, the world couldn't go on. Good practice for you." She had thought at the time that he would do it much better.

It grew increasingly hard to account for his continued absence with airy matter-of-factness. There would come a time when the excuse of business would not serve. And she began, in spite of her self-control, to wonder what would be the end. She could not accept invitations for him, and those she accepted for herself were embarrassing, even with her new frocks to divert the women's attention. The situation was not really disturbing—except in her self-abasement for the lies she had had to tell—but it was not altogether comfortable. If she could have gone back to Town herself—but that was one thing she would not do. She understood clearly now that when he did not want her, she was better away.

She busied herself in revising her household arrangements, in training the new maid she had taken on, in making such visits as she could not put off, and for the rest dividing her time between Pillicock and Wagtail.

She was not at all unhappy or worried, she told herself. But it was all a little queer. She might be safe now from the old shame and anxiety and despair and fear of gossiping tongues, safe; but it was a strange home-coming.

XLII. A CLOUD OVER THE MOON

THEN he came.

The whole village saw him come, and remarked that it was three weeks to a day since Olwen had returned alone. It was, in fact, just after Whitsuntide, in early June, that he came back.

But no one except Wagtail saw her lift a startled face from the crimson rambler she was trying to train and fly to his arms. Wagtail turned his back, blew his nose, and told no one what he saw.

It was so marvellous that he should be there, radiant with the delight of being with her again.

To all her suggestions he had but one answer.

"Come and see the garden."

"I'd rather see you."

"Don't you want to come upstairs and wash?"

"Not yet. I'd rather see you."

"Don't you want some tea?"

"'Drink to me only—' Doesn't fit exactly, does it? I'd rather see you."

"Well, now that you see me, sir, how do I look?"

"Lovely! But I could make an improvement. Run upstairs and put on the green dress?"

"The one without any neck?"

"Right. And I'll go up, too; I want to get at my bags."

At the top of the stairs she said: "I've put you in the east room—over there."

"By myself?" He looked as if he understood. "All right—so long as you don't lock your door."

"And if I should . . . ?"

"There's no 'if' about it."

When she came out in the green dress he met her with a small case: "There you are." It was his first present except the wedding ring—a long string of splendid moonstones, linked with gold.

He put it on her neck: "Moons—many moons—in the Forest, and at the heart of it all—the nymph," he said.

She was lost in wonder and delight; then she pondered his words: "Do they mean anything?"

"I hope so."

"Do they mean you're going to stay here—many moons?"

"I hope so."

She turned and raised her lips in thanks. It seemed at that moment as if all the experience of her past life lay far below this insurmountable peak of happiness. It seemed as if one must die because there could never again be anything better or even so good.

She said, with misgiving in her voice: "Shall I be able to make you happy?"

He laughed: "I hope so."

It was unreal; it was not happening; it was not happening to her. There was no way of believing that such things were true.

But they were at dinner; and he was still there.

After dinner they walked in the garden; and he was still there. Her moonstones shimmered in the light of a young moon; and her green dress vanished among the green shadows; but he was still there. She could hear him and feel the touch of his arms and his lips. At any moment—at any moment the spell might break: she would find herself with a bump dropped into real life again. She was afraid to breathe.

He had so much to tell. He had written another play, a jolly sight better than the first. Various people had said so. It was with a manager. He had hopes. . . . They might be going up to see it together some day before long—perhaps next winter. . . .

Next winter? Would things be like this so long as next winter?

"But you will read it to me before then?"

"Yes." He had brought the carbon purposely. He would read it tomorrow. Not waste time on it tonight.

"And when you are a famous writer?" she asked, rather wistfully.

"When! when!" he laughed. "When the mountain comes to Mohammed. Still, it's pleasant to have something to work at, for a change. I might do another down here. Who knows? At all events, I'm going to read some old plays and find out better, if I can, how to do it. I'm having a big box of books sent down."

That was the first thing that seemed solid, really substantial.

"Is there anything I could do—any way to help?"

"We could read them together—you being all the women, and I all the men!"

Paradise still in that June garden, with the crimson rambler casting its delicate shadows on the paths they trod, and the fragrant roses and the hawthorn and the early honeysuckle making the air they breathed unreal.

"Whatever may come"—Olwen stopped and leaned back against his shoulder with her eyes closed—"I can stand it. I shall have had this. Nothing can take from me this I have had."

"This—and better still," he whispered. "Shall we go upstairs?"

It was the first cloud. Or was it only a cloud over the moon?

XLIII. GOOSEBERRY FOOL

IN THE morning there was no cloud. The sun was slanting through the window. The starlings had long been whispering and fluttering in the eaves, and now were gone down to nip off pansies' heads, naughty things!

In the garden Wagtail was talking to some one in a reproving tone—Pillicock? Perhaps he had been chasing a robin again.

She had to get up to see. Yes, but it was worse. He had caught the robin. There was nothing left of that robin but a wing. Wagtail was scolding him; and he was looking amazed. He could not understand why he shouldn't have his breakfast. Robins were made for cats to eat. Of course!

Well, it was too late to waste any sympathy on that particular bird. Cats must be cats, and men must be men; and the sooner one admitted it, the better. Well, and women must be women? She was not thinking of that.

She wondered what would happen if she stole across the hall to the east room; the door was half open.

She peeped through the crack, her nose at once full of tobacco smoke: he was sitting up in bed, pipe in mouth, a pad on his knee, evidently writing. She slipped away unseen.

Now what would a good wife do? She would have her bath as quietly as possible, put on a fresh summer frock, and go down to breakfast, which must be waiting, although Molly had had careful instructions, the night before, not to sound the gong; and she would be busy with occupations of her

own when it pleased his lordship to desire food. That was the way it should be; and if Molly objected, there were more of her kind in Bristol. It was so easy to do—all that: so easy to be a good wife. Except that she wanted to sing and could not; except that she wanted to play Bach and Mozart and Scarlatti in a way that would have lifted the hairs from their respected heads, if alive; and she had to be quiet, or she might disturb . . .

However, there was plenty to do—plenty to do. She had to remember things he did not eat, and to plan luncheon and dinner. She had letters and the morning paper, which she could not read for a strange, hypnotic excitement. This was playing at life. It would come real some day. She did not want it to come real.

She was in the dining-room, arranging pansies in a low bowl on the table—some of the nipped ones, poor dears!—when he came in.

"Why didn't you say breakfast was ready?" he asked, evidently annoyed.

She hesitated, then confessed her peeping. As he said nothing, she added hastily: "It won't be a minute; it was all ready to be finished the moment you came."

He found his letters and turned them over; laid them down, frowning a little, and took up *The Times.*

She went round the table and hovered a moment. She did not want to offer her morning kiss; and he had made no sign: in fact, he was behind the newspaper now.

Her eyes strayed down to his feet. For the first time he wore slippers. How odd! she thought, to see him in slippers, and—she did not mean to think it—how hideous they were! During their brief honeymoon they had always been going somewhere in the morning. This was the beginning of a real domesticity; and, though she could not say why, she was oddly repelled. Perhaps it was because they were so ugly, those red

things. The kind of things Dr. Gibbs . . . oh, hush! Perhaps they had been a present. But from whom? Aunt Victoria? But he had no Aunt Victoria. Not that actress, Allardyce Weston? She laughed; and the next moment was aware of a sense of relief that she could laugh.

"I'll go and see about your breakfast," she said; but he did not seem to hear. He had doubtless hit upon something very interesting in *The Times*.

Molly was busy with the second breakfast, a trifle sulky, but not unduly for a girl whose morning's work was being kept back.

Would a really good wife return with the breakfast and try to be entertaining? Olwen wondered. She decided not. She hesitated a moment in the hall after Molly had taken the breakfast in.

When the girl came out again, she was surprised to find her mistress dimpling with laughter in the kitchen.

"Where's your market-basket, Molly?" she demanded. "You're late this morning; so I'll do the shopping."

Basket on arm, she tiptoed through the hall and upstairs for her hat, and down again and through the garden and out by the lower gate so as not to be seen from the dining-room windows.

Wagtail was busy among the vegetables: "There you are, Mum," he called, hobbling toward her. "I can pick you a fine mess of peas this morning, Mum, and with a bit o' mint. . . ."

"Good!" she said, clapping her hands so that the round basket bobbed. "Oh, Wagtail, I'm so happy!"

"I can see that, Mum," he said. "My old eyes ain't too far gone for that, and if they wore, Mum, seein' you'd cure 'em, like."

He turned his back before she could find breath to thank him for the rare compliment.

"Gooseberries, Mum?" he called from the back of his hand.

"Gooseberry fool," she called back; and found herself free to sing as she went on to the garden gate.

Out in the road she saw coming some one she knew. Bother! There would be questions now, more gossip. Well, let them come. Let them see for themselves how happy she was.

"Gooseberry fool!"

XLIV. IT'S LIVING

AT LUNCHEON time she sounded the gong herself, not knowing whether he would come from upstairs or from the library. She had been in the kitchen, and had slipped up to her room, past the shut door, to cool her hot face and tidy her hair. When he came into the dining-room she was already there, and had assuaged the starvation pangs of the greedy Pillicock.

"Good morning," she said, with a curtsy.

He stopped and thrust his hands into his trousers pockets. "Hullo!" he said. "You look hot. Where have you been all the morning?"

"Busy," she said; and Molly came in.

"I shall not speak first," she said to herself. "Why should I? And if I do, I may say the wrong thing. Who said 'Silence is golden'?"

It began to look as if the dining-room might be full of gold before luncheon ended.

"But really," said Olwen, "as I have nothing to say, it's better to be a trifle dull than to be snubbed for saying nothing. I don't mind."

By signs and in undertones she indicated to Pillicock that he was not to jump into her lap. She remembered guiltily that he had every reason for expecting this privilege. She was almost inclined for a moment to yield the point—he was so urgent; and a man who came to luncheon in red slippers could hardly expect one to be formal. . . . Still, she banished Pilli-

cock, and devoted herself to gooseberry fool as if there were nothing else in the world.

Was it because her father was a doctor that he had never worn slippers? That must be it; and the reason why she disliked them was because she was not accustomed to them. It was a relief to have found that out.

In the end she had to speak. It would be rather—well, not dreadful, but a bad beginning if they were to end their first luncheon at home—their first meal together at home—in unbroken silence.

But she had thought over and discarded many remarks before she finally observed: "I've arranged Dad's old surgery into a kind of study for you." At least he could not suppose that this was said for the purpose of making conversation. But she had intended to surprise him—to lead him there blindfold and hear him exclaim with pleasure over the arrangements for his comfort. She was vexed that she had let the fact slip out in that bald way.

"Thanks," he said, and stooped for his serviette, which had fallen.

There seemed no more surprise than gratitude in his tone: "You've seen it?" she asked.

"No."

She ventured to add: "I hope you'll like it; I mean, I hope you can work there."

Silence. Then: "I never can tell where I can work till I try. I was working in bed this morning."

"I hope it went well?" she said.

"No, it didn't."

The tone didn't invite sympathy, nor yet the futile, "Perhaps it will go better tomorrow." So she said nothing.

As they rose from table he asked her what she was going to do; and hearing that she had not made up her mind, added: "I'm going to drive to Bristol."

Was it an invitation? Best not take it so: "Shall you be home for dinner?"

"I thought you might care to come," he said, rather huffily.

"Me? I should love it! I'll run and get ready."

Every one saw them driving through the town. The human girl in Olwen exulted whenever she bowed to an old acquaintance. She was looking her best in her new finery, and by her side was a husband not to be ashamed of, a distinguished-looking husband. . . .

As they turned into the country road, the last houses of the town gliding behind them, he turned to her with a glint of malice: "Well, were you satisfied, Bear-ward? Or should I have worn my chains more openly?"

The suddenness of it took her breath. He relented: "I didn't mean to hurt you. But I couldn't resist. You've one more thing to remember now—the woman's triumph."

"You are bitter," she said slowly. Perhaps it would not have hurt so much if she had not been caught in the midst of it—had not instantly recognised that the charge was true.

"Not in the least," he answered amiably, and added, without change of tone: "I thought I might be able to pick up some copies of old plays at Bristol. If I'm ever going to do anything, I've got to go at it seriously and find out what others have done. They used to write jolly clever plays in the seventeenth century—Congreve, you know, and all those old boys. And I thought you might be wanting some ribbons."

"Ribbons?" laughed Olwen. "I'm beribboned until the fashions change."

"Which won't be long," he retorted. "All right, then. You may come with me."

As they drove through the city she could not help remembering the last time she had been there—her desperate errand. She half expected to see the little doctor, with her steady eyes and firmly-shut mouth. She wondered a moment whether she

should run away and try to find her, to tell her. . . . No, wait a bit. Not spoil this day. And it was still so soon. . . .

Impossible to account for thoughts or for the vague sense of discomfort that followed them. It must be, of course, no more than the gradual slipping to earth from Paradise. It would not come with a bump, after all.

And it was a delightful afternoon. Kingsland did not find many plays; but in an antique dealer's window he noticed a moonstone bracelet that went amazingly well with her necklace and demanded to be bought. Then, after a gay tea, they drove home through the June twilight.

Happy as she was, Olwen could not deny to herself that she had a headache, though she said nothing about it. There was something troubling the depths of her mind. She wished it would come up to the surface so that she could get it over. But it would not.

She was glad, however, that Kingsland settled down to one of his new books—an old novel by some unknown woman of the eighteenth century, full of passionate love scenes, oaths and oratory, fainting-spells and spasms. She was content to sit in her low chair with a sleepy Pillicock on her knee and to think of nothing but the stray bits that her husband read aloud, chuckling.

Once she protested a little: "The poor old thing means it all so seriously; it's almost a shame to laugh at her."

"But isn't it funny?"

She had to admit that.

"Most things that are taken too seriously are."

She pondered over that. It might be true; if so, it was worth remembering.

He read no more aloud, but continued to laugh to himself as he turned the pages. At last he shut the book with a bang that sent dust flying and made Pillicock sneeze.

"Love! love!" he said. "It's all about love. And who knows what love is? Not that sentimental old woman!"

"Do you?" asked Olwen.

He turned, smiling: "I thought we did."

"I wonder," she whispered to Pillicock, who made no reply.

He opened his book again: "I'll give you a definition some day. Let's live a little longer first."

After a few moments Olwen said, "If you don't mind, I think I'll go upstairs."

"To bed?" he asked. "So early?" and went on reading.

She let Pillicock go and rose, hesitating whether or not to offer a good-night kiss. There had been so many things said about the habits of married people—the routine of marriage. . . . Better not, perhaps.

But as she passed him she said: "Thank you again for the lovely bracelet," and let her hand brush his cheek in passing.

He reached out his hand as if to seize hers, but lazily, and missed it; and so went on reading.

Upstairs by her door she stood with her hand on the knob. If she should turn the key? She turned it; and in a swift panic turned it back. She could not even imagine what would happen if he came to her room and found the door locked. There must be some other way. For she was resolved that he should not come tonight. . . . Probably he would not; but if he did. . . . No, she must find another way. It was not that she was so tired—though she was tired—nor that her head ached so badly—though it ached badly enough; but that, whatever this love might be, it must not be worn out, must not be spoiled. If he could not keep away, it must be her business sometimes. . . .

She lay wide awake, staring into the darkness.

She heard Molly laughing and talking at the gate—she had not been slow to find a young man to walk out with: the first night she went to Chapel. . . . She heard Molly come in and climb the kitchen stairs.

The thing that was troubling her would not come into

consciousness; yet she could not keep herself from remembering those wild nights when she had waited and waited, least of all that last time when she had waited in vain.

He was coming upstairs now, not at all quietly. Would he pause at her closed door? No, not for a second. He went past without a break in the rhythm of his steps and closed his own door, as one indifferent whether or not he was heard. She remembered his noiseless stealing up, the flashlight. . . . And again the whole world seemed unreal.

Perhaps it was the way his door had closed that settled her nerves. She fell asleep soon after; and started up in terror, long after—she had no idea how long—with groping hands upon her.

"Oh!" she half screamed, "no!"

Then his voice: "It's no burglar. Wait. I'll turn on the light."

She sat up, trying to laugh off her terror; but while she was looking at him, wondering what in the world she could say or do to carry out her purpose, the thought that obtruded —oh, most unwelcome!—was how ugly he looked: a kind of surly ugliness in his looks that she had never seen before. It was the hideous red dressing-gown, of course: he ought never to wear red. Being a man he had not thought of that—all men liked red. . . .

"What are you thinking about?" he challenged.

"I'm thinking I may get you a new dressing-gown for—for Christmas—a blue one."

He stared, then laughed: "You're a funny child! What's the matter with this? My mind's not on dressing-gowns. . . . But since you don't like it, I'll take it off."

He was coming near when she put out a protesting arm: "Please—not tonight."

He was blunt: "What's the matter? Aren't you well?"

"Yes—no. It was only last night. . . ."

Then she was in darkness again. How could he have reached the light so soon? "Very well," he said. "Good night."

Things could not be left that way. No good wife would leave them that way. She would have to go after him and explain, have an understanding.

But that was not so easily done.

"Dear," she said, kneeling by him.

He could not have been asleep so soon; but the only response she had was a sound which later—not then—she had to call a grunt.

"I'm so sorry. It isn't that I don't want you. You may do as you please. But I thought . . . you said . . . you know we talked. . . ."

"Run away to bed," was his reply.

"But I don't want you to feel . . ."

"All right. Go to bed."

"You're hurt. . . ."

"No, I'm not. Go away and let me sleep."

She would have tried then to kiss him good night, to see if her peace was really made; but he turned his head abruptly away.

Certainly she had bungled. How could one always be bungling things.

She got back to bed, catching herself in a sigh. No, this should not make her unhappy. The thing was to have a good night's rest and attack the problem in the morning. That was the sensible . . .

As if by a flare of summer lightning, the submerged thought that had been troubling her ever since the moment he had charged her with leading a husband in triumph before the village—this thought became illuminated. He was letting her see for herself. She had not believed that marriage was impossible for them. Now he was letting her see!

The idea was incredible, monstrous; but it was there.

Incredible that he should have changed his mind, just for that. But the idea was there. And it was a thing impossible to ask about.

It could not be true; but if it was true, what did he mean by it? If they couldn't make it go he would be as wretched as she. . . . He could always get away, of course; and he would never want to marry any one else; that was sure. It was utter nonsense—unjust; but it was there.

If it was there it must be looked at, faced down.

"Very well," she said to herself. "It's not true. But if it were true it would be my business to make a success of it. And since it won't go away—not tonight, anyhow—I must pretend it's true; and find some way out."

As she sat there, hugging her knees in the summer darkness, she remembered, as if the words had just been spoken, one bitter sentence of his about marriage:

"That's a form of hell I hope to escape."

If now he had deliberately put himself in such a hell, what? Well, what? It would make of their life together a game which one had to play without rules, a warfare without laws. It meant one would have to walk carefully. Would it be of any use to walk carefully in hell?

Still, whatever the reasons, there they were; and there they would remain until the next turn of the wheel. In the meantime, they had the moments, one by one; like every one else, they had only these, to make of what they could.

Moment by moment she would have to see what she could do with their two lives. And moment by moment, no doubt, he might be doing the same; only she could never—never—know how or why, never break down the wall between them. It would mean a prolonged struggle; it would mean many kinds of grief; but, after all . . .

"After all," she concluded, "it's living. It's worth while."

XLV. THAT OTHER DAY

IN THE morning she started awake with a sense of panic: something had been forgotten—something important. Ah, she had not told Molly when to take him hot water or when to sound the gong. But it was still too early for any one but the birds.

If she had asked him when he wanted breakfast, he would have answered, "Any time you like." And she would have been no better off than before. She would have known, as she knew now, that he knew what he wanted; and she would have had to divine it, as she did now. So nothing was lost by her negligence.

Well, and how could a good wife know when her reticent husband wished to breakfast? They had been very late in Town, of course; and he was wanting to work. Still. . . .

When Molly brought the tea she was bidden to tell her master with the shaving water that breakfast would be at nine. If that proved to be too early or too late, well, the hour could be changed. Life was a moment-by-moment business, as she had decided the night before.

His door was half open when she went downstairs, but she deliberately did not look. There was no one in the dining-room but Pillicock. They breakfasted together, and she, not Pillicock, had reached the marmalade stage and had nearly read the paper, when her husband came in. Purposely she did not look up until greeted by his cheerful: "Hullo! Aren't you going to speak to a fellow?"

"Hullo yourself!"

Then his eyes fell on the heap of letters by his plate. He turned them over rapidly and threw them aside with an air of disappointment: "I thought Haywood might . . ." She knew Haywood was the manager who had his play.

She pushed *The Times* across the table, and would have left him to it; but he said: "What's your haste?"

"I thought you'd prefer to be left with your paper and your mail." She sat down again, with her elbows on the table, and smiled; and he smiled back:

"Well, let's see what the postman has brought. Bills—tailor, bootmaker, subscription for . . . invitation to . . . Hullo! what's this?"

He was reading with interest and attention, while she wondered wistfully how much hold upon him his life in Town had. He threw the letter across the table: "This will interest you."

He had, it seemed from the letter, given to an architect friend a sketch of Kingsland House, and had asked about the possibilities and cost of restoration. It was going to be very expensive; and the architect suggested that he run down some day and see for himself what could be done.

"I've my thousand pounds," said Olwen.

"What thousand pounds?"

"Don't you remember—that Uncle Simon gave me for a wedding present? And there's the money Dad got for the land we sold in the North."

"What of it?"

"Towards the house, I mean."

"My dear child, you'll keep that money for yourself—for your old age."

His words sent a thrill of fear through her. They sounded as if she might have to think of herself as growing old alone. She remembered that when her aunt had been urging her to

go to Town with them so that she might have a better chance of finding a husband, her uncle had said abruptly: "It's all very well now, my girl, while you're so young, being independent; but it's not so fine growing old alone. You'll be an old woman some day. It's the kids, you know, that count."

She had thought then of retorting: "Well, you married and had six children; and where are they now?" Three sons dead; one in Canada; the daughters married, one in Yorkshire and tied to a growing family of her own, and one in Australia. And there they were—her uncle and aunt—growing old together, and alone: he with his mind absorbed in the tea business and she with her tatting and Church work. As far apart as two people could be, yet married: she subduing all other thought till she got him safe out of the house a morning, and then settling down to her domesticity; he with never a thought to throw at her unless something went wrong in the household machinery. Newspapers and tatting and Church Sunday morning and Sunday evening, and Sunday afternoon a nap that prolonged itself until tea-time. And he was talking of a lonely old age. . . .

Of course she had said nothing of all this at the time; but she remembered it now. Somehow the thought of a lonely old age was different now—a thing hardly to be faced, even if there were no . . .

Her arms began to ache, her breast, her whole body. She knew that she wanted a child of her own—desperately!

What was he saying?

"I'm not living on fifty pounds a year now, you know. The land pays ten times that and more. If I hadn't bought the car we might; but in the spring . . . the spring will be a good time to build. We'll have Goring down some week-end and make plans."

Make plans? For the spring? The terror vanished.

"Of course, if your investments aren't as good as they should be we must have them looked into. I know a man. . . ."

It was pleasant to have some one to take care of that for her. Perhaps, after all, it was pride that made him refuse her offer.

"But I should like to have a share in the building of the house," she urged softly.

"So you shall. You shall be the architect's boss. I don't want any bother with the thing. For all you know I may be up in town rehearsing a play—that isn't written. I should have heard from Haywood by this."

"Isn't it a good sign when they keep things a long time?" she tried by way of encouragement.

"Unless they've forgotten them. That's more likely, I fancy," was the grim retort.

But he had practically asked her to stay through breakfast —that was a good sign. He had begun to talk of plans and troubles to her. So much to the good. All those moments were saved, clear gain.

Breakfast finished, he rose and stretched himself with an air of lazy content that reminded her of Pillicock. Seemingly he bore no grudge for her refusal the night before. Was he beginning to feel at home a little bit? It was too soon to hope.

"I looked at my lovely new bracelet this morning," she said.

"So? It still looks good? You might manage a kiss for it." He was so startlingly abrupt: "What are we going to do today?"

We! Should she say, "Anything you like?" No, he wanted an idea.

"If your books had come we could begin to read."

"So we could. I'd better go to the station to see about them."

"Let Wagtail. Isn't there something among those you bought yesterday . . . ?"

He shook that aside: "There's Shakespeare, of course. But we don't try to do plays his way any more. Not much help there. Should you like to try him?"

"Yes," she said quickly. *"Romeo and Juliet."*

"I wonder why?" He looked at her. Another of those moments for which one would have bargained life itself!

"As You Like It would be more appropriate—here in the Forest," he said.

"Another time; up among the trees. Today I want *Romeo."*

"All right, if you insist on tragedy." He grumbled, but he was not dissatisfied. "I'll take care of some letters that shouldn't wait, and be with you in an hour."

"I shall be in the drawing-room. I'm going to make a noise there. But I'll shut the door."

She did not make a great noise—only a small soft-pedal noise; but she trilled and rippled with her heart-strings until Haydn and Scarlatti, and Bach—the ghosts of them—might have come and stood at her shoulder: "My good child, not so bad, not so bad. If you only had a little technique . . ."

When he came with the book and the question, "Where shall we read?" she had her answer on her tongue: "In the summer-house, of course."

So they had all June to themselves on the terrace overlooking the shallow Severn. No sounds but the hum of a bee or two in the honeysuckle, and, at the far end of the garden, of Wagtail cutting grass. There was a smell too of the grass he had cut earlier and a breeze that barely touched in passing —and the love of Romeo and Juliet.

That he should read so well and she not know it before! She almost forgot her parts, and had to be reminded more than once. The living dream was with her still. There would be awakening; but not yet—not yet . . .

She was almost glad when the luncheon hour kept them from the tragedy; they had just got through the marriage

night when Wagtail hobbled along the path to say that they might not know the gong had sounded. She was glad to stop there.

"We shall finish it another day," she said. "You can't catch me"—and ran to the house. He did not try to catch her. . . . Would she have run so gaily had she known that other day would never come?

XLVI. ON THE ROMAN ROAD

BUT the afternoon was a failure.

She suggested a drive: there might be more books he wanted at Gloucester.

He said curtly that he was going to try to write a little, and went to his own room.

She wondered whether she should take him to the study she had so carefully planned, without the small ceremony of love speeches she had hoped for—perhaps just open the door and say: "Try this." But it seemed not to be the time; she left him undisturbed, and busied herself with various household matters and a little sewing, until near tea-time.

When he came down, however, the drawing-room was full of women. They could not get over the coincidence that so many of them had chanced upon the same day. There was a riot of low voices and polite laughter.

He behaved well, she admitted, watching him not without a certain anxiety. He said little, but everything he said had its effect. It would all be repeated in a report which, she felt sure, would be favourable. He did not smile at their banter; but as he came back every time, they probably liked him none the less for that.

Were there always—Olwen frowned into the teapot—such foolish, such silly, irritating remarks when people got married?

But the hour passed, and the guests departed in groups.

When they two were alone once more, there was still afternoon sunshine.

He kicked over a small footstool on which Mrs. Cheriton's feet had reposed, stooped and set it right, and kicked it over again.

"It's a silly thing," said Olwen. "I'll get rid of it. But Aunt Victoria made it for Dad years ago."

"Oh, leave it," he said irritably. "It's a part of the drawing-room idea."

"Don't they have drawing-rooms in London?" She wondered whether she was a little sly or only rash.

"Probably. But they don't catch me often."

"I'd have warned you today," said Olwen, "if I'd known."

"Once. But it will happen again. It will happen all the time. It's a part of the—domestic life."

That was pretty bad. She felt suddenly cold, as if all her blood were being dragged back to her heart. She gave herself a little shake; but women did not faint these days. Only in that silly woman's novel he had read last night, and others like them.

"What do you want me to do about it?" she asked quietly.

"Nothing. There's nothing to do but cover a curse with a smile." He sat down, took out a penknife, and began to scrape his nails.

Why shouldn't he? He was at home. There was nothing wrong about that except—except that she did not want to see it. Silly—but she turned her eyes away.

After a moment he looked up and apparently felt that something was the matter, for he said: "Ink," and put the knife away.

It was the smallest thing in the world; but it jarred. And the worst of the effect was that she could not explain to her-

self—perhaps because she would not allow herself words—why it jarred.

"It's early yet," she observed.

"I was thinking about going to Gloucester," he said. "I might be able to get some books there."

A swift little flutter of joy; then she felt bound to remind him: "The shops will be closed."

"I wasn't thinking of shops. There's a man named Onslow who lives at Tuffley. At Marlborough with me. Always booky. I've dropped in to see him several times since I've had the car. I might drive over . . ."

No question about her, then, she saw at once.

"Before dinner?"

"He won't mind my dropping in; he's a bachelor."

It was not malicious—oh, to be sure, it was not malicious; but she wished it unsaid.

"I might be rather late." He hesitated. "In fact, he'll want to put me up. . . ."

"Oh, you must stay!" It really seemed as if she wanted to be rid of him. But her panic of urgency was caused by her swift realisation that it galled him to have to—not to ask her, but to have even to consider her in making his plans.

"Many thanks," he said drily. From his irony she knew that she was right; but what to do—what to do quickly?

"All I meant was—all I meant was"—oh, why was she so stupid?—"you know you're absolutely free!"

"Do I?"—the same tone. "Thanks again."

"But . . ." It was growing worse; and she could not tell how to stop it.

"You have all the ideals of the good wife, Olwen."

That stung her to the question: "But what else could I say?"

"Nothing, nothing at all." He withdrew his arm from the pleading hand she had laid on it, and was for going.

"Wait a minute," she tried to say, and he paused: "After this—when you wish to—to do anything—I wish you would do it without saying a word to me."

He looked at her as if he did not know how to take this.

"I mean, it may help you to realise that I meant what I said—that as far as I am concerned you *are* free!"

"Can you work miracles, my dear?" he asked, more kindly.

"Yes."

At this he laughed and went upstairs.

She heard him moving about in the room above; he was doubtless getting together what he would need for the night. He certainly meant to stay. When he came down he would, as a matter of duty, come for the ceremony of good-bye. Well, she would spare him that. As quick as thought, she was out of the house and through the garden and out on the Roman road that ran crookedly up into the Forest. She imagined him looking first in the drawing-room, then in the library; then, perhaps swearing a little under his breath, going upstairs to see if she was in her room; at last, at the garden door, under the old stone carving of Sailwell, standing there with the late sunshine—which she now had glinting between trees—on his rough hair. Would he call? Would he even go so far as the summer-house on the terrace? Of one thing she was sure: that he would not change his plan and wait until she returned.

It was a rough road to run on, the Roman road. But why run? There was no possible reason for running—as if he would come after her and drag her back and beat her for being naughty! She remembered that he had once said that if they were married, he would—throw her out of the window? Yes, that was it. In joke, of course. But it was an odd thing that she should almost have thrown herself out of the window in her mad haste to avoid saying good-bye to him. It was a mad thing to do, and would have to be explained

when he came home in the morning. And it could not be explained, for there were no words to tell it in. He would be annoyed because it could not be explained. There would be no going on with *Romeo and Juliet*. . . .

She suppressed a cry as a sharp-edged, uptilted paving-stone cut her thin shoe, and stopping to recover her balance, she wished she had not run; she wished she could go back now and tell him how sorry she was. But now he was far on the highway to Gloucester.

She sat down among the bracken to look at her hurt foot. Behind her a sudden little flutter—bird or rabbit—and silence fell again. There would be no one coming along the Roman road. It was long since the Roman road knew the tread of many feet.

Yes, her foot was cut. Instead of climbing to the woods she had better go home and bandage it.

But it was so pleasant there under the bracken, so fresh to one's tired spirit; and where her body bruised the fern, a pungent fragrance. She would sit there for a little while, perhaps until the sun went down, and—not think, no; but try to recover her poise, her sense that, after all, there was nothing wrong, she had done nothing so wrong in following an impulse she could not explain. As for his going away, it was better: it would avoid the difficulty of the night before; and no doubt he had that in mind. And as for not waiting to say good-bye—a few words more or less, what did they matter?—he would not care much; it was only herself she had hurt in doing that.

If only one could keep from hurting oneself, life could be so simple. How simple it must have been in the old, old days when the Roman road was made! It was soothing to try to imagine it.

Immediately in front of her there were six or eight feet of unbroken kerbing, covered with fine dark moss, but as

sound and upright as the day it was laid, and still rising some inches above the road itself. Beyond it were the big flat stones, some of them still square, some broken, some in place, some badly tilted like the one that had cut her foot—so climbing the hill in a gentle swing. On the far side of the road opposite her the kerb was gone, but she could see it a little further up. About eight feet wide, the road must have been. What did the carts do when they met? Or were there no carts, only messengers on horses and the long, brown ranks of legionaries? Those she could not seem to see well; perhaps if she had gone to Rome she might have imagined them better. They might go to Rome still; it was something to suggest when he seemed to be—not bored; but the word had slipped in. Well, bored, then; everybody got bored sometimes. But perhaps he had worn out Rome long ago. . . .

A long snake of stones, with high kerbs, winding its way through the Forest from Monmouth—was it?—to the ford of Severn. There must have been a ford near Sailwell—there were so many sandbanks when the tide was out. And these roads had been everywhere through the Forest. It was said there were almost no roads that were not made on Roman foundations. The road Anthony was on now, half way to Gloucester. . . .

Think of the lives that had gone into the making of those roads. She dimly remembered that once, long before, her father had read her an account of the way it was done. She seemed to have an impression of a great noise of stone-cutting and hauling, and of shouts and cries as the whips of Roman overseers fell on the shoulders of slaves. Tattooed, long-haired Britons, dressed in skins—her ancestors making the roads. They had fought the Romans—oh, they had fought! And Caradoc, her ancestor. But who knew whether he was really her ancestor? Certain it was that she was of the blood of these ancient people who had come from no man knew where, who

had roamed this forest, as savage as the wild swine they speared for their food, who had fought the Romans as the wild swine had fought them, and who had been enslaved in order that the roads might be built, and the iron mines mined. What for? Civilisation, the Roman civilisation. And where was that? It had lived only—less than a thousand years, less than some of the oaks in the Forest now, perhaps Yed-of-the-Yat, and one or two others. And no more was left of it than such symbols as the broken road at her feet, the road that had no more use today than to cut the foot of a silly woman flying from her own happiness!

Still—not even a bird calling; and the sun had slipped away so that she had not noticed, had slipped into a grey cloud-bank; no fair augury for tomorrow. . . . Let tomorrow take care of itself. In a moment she must be going home; and she had the night to think of first.

Still—and the clatter there must have been in the days of the Romans: the tramp of feet on these smooth flat stones. They would make a noise . . . there was a noise. It was only one man. A belated collier? They did not often take this road: they cut across the fields.

She hastily pulled her skirt over the injured foot. There was Gibbs on the Roman Road.

XLVII. THE WAY OF IT WITH GIBBS

HE LOOKED both startled and embarrassed as he raised his hat; but all he said was: "I haven't seen you before—to congratulate you, Mrs. Kingsland."

She flashed back: "It's not too late!"

He bowed; then looked about him, clearly expecting her husband to appear.

No use looking for him on the brambles, she thought absurdly. No blackberries for three months yet. And so thinking, added, by way of corollary, what a crazy mind she had, and also that the mere thought of September made the air seem a little cold. She positively shivered; but she could not move.

"I've been up to see young Prickett," he said, as if some explanation were needed for his appearance on the Roman road.

"Is he better?"

"Not much. I doubt whether he will ever be much better. Not enough to be of any particular use to his father and mother; a burden rather. It's a question whether he should have been brought back."

"Oh, yes!" she insisted, remembering the mother's agony before she knew he was alive.

"No doubt you are right," he said, with cold politeness. "But it gives the poor old woman two nearly helpless beings on her hands instead of one."

"Women don't mind that," she said. "Not when they . . ."

She bit back the word. "Women are such geese as to like it, you know," she concluded.

If he read her thought, he gave no sign: "There's the money part of it as well—making ends meet."

Of course, he would think of that, flashed into her mind. Then she was sorry, remembering how poor he had been, and how he had had to work his way up; remembering how poor the Pricketts had been, even when both the man and the boy were able-bodied; and now that they had to hire two men on the farm . . .

"I wonder if I could help them?" she asked him.

"Penny charity couldn't do anything"—he seemed to rebuke her. "It's a question of staying on or getting out. And when a family's been settled for generations . . . Bob talks of Canada when he's more rational. Fancy those old people in Canada. . . . If I could . . ."

He left his sentence unfinished.

"Perhaps An— Mr. Kingsland could tide them over," she said.

He shrugged, but with what meaning she was unable to discern.

He pulled out the watch that her critical temper had long ago recognised as too showy: "It's late, and I think it's going to rain. I must be off."

She did not move. He looked at her with patent surprise. He must be wondering, Was the woman going to sit out there all night and be rained upon? But he clearly thought it no business of his and went on.

The moment he turned the next curve she tried her foot, and found she could hardly limp. There was a swelling. Like it or not, she had to call him back.

He came almost on the run: "Something wrong? I thought there was."

"My foot," she said ruefully. "Will you have a look? I took

off my shoe and stocking to see. . . . And now it seems to be swelling."

"Sit down again," he said curtly; and took the foot in his hands.

Even though he pained her, even then—so wicked is the human heart!—she was proud that the poor hurt thing was so delicately pretty. He could hardly be human if he did not see, even when he was looking for broken bones, the lines and the texture of it.

But if he saw, he gave no sign. In novels—it crossed her mind and she almost laughed—in novels he would have begun by pressing it to his lips and making tender sentimental remarks.

What he said was: "Nothing much; a strained ligament. But it had better be bandaged. I've the things in my bag."

As he worked he said drily, "Lucky thing I happened along. My car's being done up; so I walked and took the short cut."

She assured him demurely, as he helped her to her feet, that she valued her good luck.

"It's no easy going, this road," he said, apparently speculating upon ways and means of getting her home. "But if you'll make a crutch of me and hop as much as you can, we'll manage without doing more damage."

It was, as he had said, no easy going. Even with the stout crutch of his arm it required full attention to avoid the jutting stones and the hollows where stones had been.

"Your husband will be worrying about you," was his only remark for many yards.

And hers, after several more, was: "He doesn't worry. Besides, he's not at home."

Perhaps it was this fact which made the doctor willing to continue as a crutch through the garden and into the library, and to complete his good Samaritan work by drawing up the

right chair, finding a footstool, and lingering on the hearthrug, giving careful directions for future treatment.

"You'll have no trouble," he assured her. "If you should, you can send for me, of course. But you'll be all right in a day or two."

He avoided thanks: "I'll just go and see if I can find your maid, and then I'll be off." He did not move, however; he seemed to have something on his mind.

"I have never thanked you—properly," he said, clearing his throat nervously, "for the instruments and things you sent down. At first, I wasn't going to take them. I meant every day to send them back. But one thing was needed at once, something I hadn't got. . . ."

"You see," said Olwen, "and they were meant for your patients."

"Same thing," he answered. "They gave me a lift. What I was wanting to tell you is that my sister—the lame one—is coming to live with me at Michaelmas."

He passed over her murmur of interest and went on methodically, almost doggedly: "The elder one's being married, and my mother will live with them. He'd take Ellie too; but it would be rather a load for a young chap with not too many shillings a week wages. Besides, she wants to come to me. She can keep the books and send out the bills and receipts, and manage the house—I'll get a woman in to do the work, of course. And I'm having the telephone changed so that it can be by her chair where she sits between the fire and the window. She'll be a lot of help to me."

It was a kind of pride driving him on to tell her all this, Olwen thought. She must be very careful in her reply: "It's wonderful how things come about."

He looked at her rather oddly: "Oh, they come about—in their own time and way."

It was her turn to look thoughtful: "You've given me something to think about."

Then he was ready to go. "I'll just call—what's her name? —Molly. Can she get you upstairs all right?"

"Oh, yes," said Olwen. "Besides . . ."

No doubt he thought she was going to add "There's my husband"; but she stopped, because she remembered that he would not be there.

So that was the way of it with Gibbs. His life had adjusted itself—and very well. . . . Things would work out if you gave them time. There was nothing but time—nothing but the moment of time . . . oh, and one's self. . . .

XLVIII. SHEER OFF THE EARTH

AND, of course, as she had foreseen, he did not come home that night.

She wondered if Molly would tell how he went away, not finding her; but Molly said nothing of the kind.

Still, Olwen would not have minded if she had not felt so ashamed of her flight and of its stupid consequences. They would be so hard to confess, so impossible to explain.

In spite of that, however, and of some pain in her twisted foot, she slept and had her breakfast in bed, with *The Times* all to herself and a new book which she had ordered before she was married. She had a quiet morning with it, and was amazed to find Molly in the doorway asking whether the master would be home for luncheon.

She had scarcely uttered an "I don't expect him," when the car pulled up and he was in the room almost as soon as Molly had left.

"Not ill?" he asked, with a look of quick concern.

"Not a bit. Lazy." She wanted to postpone explanation. "I didn't expect—I mean, suppose—you'd be back so early."

"Onslow's in Town, the beggar! So I put up at a hotel—no, not ours; I thought I'd better keep away from there—and early this morning I went round to some dealers and picked up a few things I wanted. . . . What makes you lazy, eh?"

He was as affectionate as one could desire; and, oddly enough, he made no reference to her absence the day before.

Had he forgotten, or hadn't he bothered to come back to say good-bye? It was strange how persistently life would not go the way one supposed it was going to go. Perhaps if she could walk on her foot it would not be necessary, after all, to confess what a fool she'd been.

"Did you find your letters?" she asked.

He was off like a shot. Of course, he was anxious about that play.

As it fell out, he never knew that she had hurt her foot.

She got downstairs without too much trouble; and when she went to her place in the dining-room he was frowning over his mail.

After a moment or two he bundled it into his pocket and followed her to the table: "Well, it seems that Haywood can't see his way at present. Finds the play interesting and all that, but ahead of the public taste. So, it seems, my dear child, that we must wait for the public taste to catch up with us."

He took the blow so well that it seemed unwise to attempt consolation.

"You might read the play to me, and I'll tell you what's wrong with the public."

"Some day. For the present let's forget it. What next?"

"Another?" she suggested.

He shook his head in silence.

"Your books have come," she remembered to say.

"So?" He was obviously not interested.

She must try something else: "Anthony, have you been in Italy—often?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I thought we might, perhaps, for a change. . . ."

"Italy? At midsummer? You're mad."

Her mind flew to the North: "Well, Norway, then."

He put down his knife and fork and stared: "What put Norway into your head?"

"I don't know." She did not make a success of her laugh.

"Do you want to go to Norway?"

"No," she had to admit. "Not particularly."

"Nor do I. Jammed with tourists. What are you getting at?"

"You asked, 'What next?' and I thought a change . . ."

"Who wants a change? This is all right."

It occurred to her that he might have taken the trouble to ask, "Do you?"

This being married showed one unsuspected—hush!

After luncheon they reached the door at almost the same moment, but she a little before. She hesitated from habit; her father had always opened the door for her. Oddly enough, it seemed now that . . . "What are you waiting for?" he asked. Clearly he had not the habit.

Her foot pained her, and she said, "Go on. I've something to do here."

But as she sat down to rest a moment, she had forgotten her foot; she was turning over in her mind the extraordinary fact that her husband had not shaved that morning. Of course, he had been in haste; he had wanted to get back early; he had lived a sort of Bohemian existence before he came into his estate. There were all sorts of excuses. The fact remained. It was utterly unimportant, the fact. But it was there. He was less good-looking, of course. Not that he had ever been so good-looking. One did not have to bother about his looks. Being his, they were all right. Only, when he had not shaved . . . Possibly it was a two days' beard. Certainly one could see that the hairs were mixed with grey. A grey-bearded man! That was funny enough to laugh at, except that it was all so irrelevant, so unimportant. The only thing was, it made one wonder about other things. . . . But there was no time to wonder if she was to live entirely in the moment. That cut out wondering. The fact remained that he had not shaved

for one day—or two. But it was too unimportant to waste a second upon. Her foot ached scandalously. She must have strained the ligament again.

Molly found her almost in tears, and fairly carried her to the library.

There she had a long afternoon, uninterrupted except by the afternoon post. Her uncle and aunt, it seemed, were at Torquay. They did not suggest an invitation; but from the tenor of the letter it could be inferred that they would not refuse one.

The petty nagging of life, that was it. To have them in the house and Anthony too: it simply couldn't be done. And not to invite them, after that wedding gift, impossible! No, they must be invited; Anthony must be told; and if he could not stand them, he must go away. But what they would think? That, of course, must be made the best of.

She thought she would get it over as soon as he came in—he had disappeared after luncheon—but he did not come in for tea.

At dinner-time, then; but he was late. She had had her soup when he came in, not hurried, not dressed, and not apologetic, but so gaily affectionate that she could hardly mind.

He waited until he had carved the joint before throwing across the table a telegram.

"What does it mean? Was Goring here?"

"Came just after lunch. I'd gone to the village to see if I could get some decent cigarettes. First time I've run out of 'em. On the way back met the boy. He ran after me. There'd been a delay somewhere. It was past two then; and you see he said they'd be moving on by two if I didn't turn up. No time even to come back and tell you. Party of five—his wife and mother, and Thompson and his wife. Found them on the point of leaving; but he said if I'd jump in with the chauffeur they'd take a run up to Kingsland and see what could be

done with the old place. I couldn't send for you, and didn't know how to get you word. It was take the offer or leave it. So I jumped in. If they could have come by the house, I'd have made them stop and pick you up—though you'd have had to sit on somebody's lap. But no cars are allowed on the Roman road, as you know."

She tried to laugh at the poor joke; but she could not hide the fact that she was hurt.

"I knew you would be," he said, dropping his gaiety. "But what else could I have done?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing," she tried to reassure him. "What did Goring say about the house?"

"He raved. Said it had to be done. But it will cost more than I've got. He didn't offer to pay for the doing up—or even, for the matter of that, to give his own services."

"We shouldn't let him," said Olwen.

"Naturally not. But we shall both be dead before we can afford it."

"We shall have to use my money," she pressed.

He did not answer in words, but his silence meant refusal.

"You could pay me back," she insisted, "when the plays are going."

"Don't rub it in," he muttered.

"Oh, but I meant that; I didn't mean . . ."

There was really no way of clearing the matter up.

The meal that began so well ended uncomfortably. It was no time for mentioning anything that would be annoying.

Bad luck, her not being able to go round with them when she had so many ideas about the old house. Perhaps they weren't any good; but you couldn't tell till they were talked of. It was one of those unfortunate situations that no one was to blame for; and yet they jar—they jar. They make it hard to live only in the moment; they carry on echoes of moments that should have been forgotten.

Of two things she could be glad: one was that she had not known. If he had managed to send word and if she had been able to walk, she greatly feared that she would have taken the short cut and run up the Roman road on foot. And he would not have been pleased. Nor, on second thoughts, would she—too much like a back-door wife. But she might have had a miserable afternoon of temptation if she had not had her lame foot. As it was, she had been peaceful and interested in her book of the morning. So the hurt foot was the second thing to be glad of.

Such a curious logic of *if's* ruled the days. If the telegram had come earlier, it would have been arranged somehow for her to be there. They could have gone in their own car. . . .

Why hadn't Anthony thought of that? He could have met them there. So easy to see now how it could all have been managed. But he had no time to think it out; of course not. And he wasn't accustomed to having any one else on his mind. . . .

And if the telegram had come a few minutes later, he would have missed Goring, and Goring would have missed the house. The house would perhaps never have been restored; and so they themselves would, perhaps, have been saved from ruin. For if it was going to cost as much as that . . . But if he would not take her money . . . ?

There was no following the *if's* to their logical ends; the threads were entangled in a network, of which, fortunately—oh, fortunately!—one saw neither the beginning nor the end.

"Don't look so sad," he was saying. "Cheer up! Goring promised to come back this way in five or six weeks, and we'll go together. We'll nab him and see whether we can't force him to find ways of bringing the cost within our means, eh?"

So things took a turn for the better when they were in the library. He had not got his cigarettes; but he had his pipe

and his Congreve. He would read her—which play should he read her?

That was no time for introducing the subject of an unwelcome visit. She must do it at breakfast.

But she had finished breakfast before he was down.

He came into the library afterwards, where she sat at her old darning of table linen, not with any thought that it might ever be needed, but because it was an occupation that kept one still and not too busy thinking.

It was not a good time for the news. His mind was on the cigarettes. He was wondering whether to send to the Stores for them or to go out in the car and see whether they could be collected from one of the neighbouring villages.

"It might be a sport," she said, "but I doubt whether you'd get your cigarettes, not your kind. It's queer you should miss them so, when you've got your pipe, which you prefer."

"I know. But I want them because I haven't got them," he explained.

"Then if you'd got them you wouldn't want them?" she countered.

"Probably not. That seems to be the way of it."

That, of course, could be applied to other things besides cigarettes, if one chose. But one must not choose.

"Let me write to the Stores for them," she said. "You wouldn't enjoy poking about in the car on such an errand. Besides, I've got other letters to write this morning. My uncle and aunt are at Torquay."

That seemed a good place to stop.

"And you must invite them here, of course."

"Well, must I?"

"Of course."

No trouble so far; but how go on?

"There's no reason in the world why you should stay here," she suggested.

"I was wondering," he answered. "Goring, in fact—Goring invited us—me . . . well, I hardly know how to put it. If there'd been time for them to call on you . . ."

"The point is," said Olwen, "that you could go to them without ceremony, but about me there's a bit of a problem."

He conceded so much.

"Well, there's no problem if I have to stay here to entertain my good uncle and aunt."

"They'd expect to see me, of course." He clearly was uncomfortable.

"I'll explain to them about the house—you could make some sort of plans for the house while you're there."

"That's a good idea. Bright child!" His conscience felt better now.

There swept through her a swift, passionate gladness that he was going, that she would not have to think of him while her relatives were there. She could explain—oh, she could lie! She had done it before. But . . . Then she was ashamed both of her gladness and of her bitterness; and sadness fell upon her.

He came and bent over her, stroking and kissing her hair: "I didn't bother you last night."

"I noticed that."

"Your door wasn't locked."

"How do you know?" She tried to respond to his caresses; but not with much warmth—she was too troubled for that.

"I tried it. I came and turned the knob and listened to your breathing. Must have been about two o'clock. But you didn't stir, and I went away."

"You didn't expect me to be stirring at that time, did you?"

He came back with another question: "But you didn't want me. Now confess."

That broke away her coldness like a great sheet of ice in

the spring. She drew him down to her, sobbing: "But I did. I always . . ."

"Then why the devil didn't you come and say so?" he demanded angrily, trying to pull away.

But she wouldn't let him go: "It seems as if we never understand each other."

"Not when your actions and your desires don't agree better than that," he retorted.

"Then I should have told you—should tell you . . . ?"

"Of course."

Somehow she knew it would not do to remind him of the very different attitude he had shown before they were married. But—which did he mean?

"If you had found the door locked, what should you have done?" she whispered.

"Broken it down probably," he answered, still savagely.

"With Molly . . . ?"

"Molly be damned! Try it and see."

She wondered why in the world she liked to hear that; and even with the wonder there swept over her the old ache of the arms, the breast, the whole body. . . . If she could have a child everything would come right. But now it was not so much the desire to have everything come right. It was sheer blind desire for the child.

She was astonished to hear herself saying: "It's perhaps as well you should be going away for a time."

"How long should they be staying?"

"They said something about a fortnight."

"I suppose I might as well send a wire and clear out at once?"

"I suppose so."

He turned away: "Well, I'm damned sorry about last night!"

How much he swore! Queer she had not noticed it until

lately. Perhaps he had not had so much cause until lately. Of course, it didn't matter—swearing. It was only a little odd it should seem to begin so abruptly. Perhaps that, like some other things, was domesticity.

He had reached the door when she called softly: "About last night . . ."

"Well?"

"If you're not in too much haste—there's tonight."

He came slowly back, looking at her hard, as if to make sure he was not mistaken in what she said.

The dream came like a winged thing and carried her sheer off the earth. . . .

XLIX. MEANWHILE

BY ANOTHER of the unexpected turns of Fortune's wheel, her aunt and uncle would not come to Sailwell. It seemed that they had not even been looking for an invitation. The sea air was what her aunt needed. What was in their minds was that she should come and visit them.

She understood then: they had wanted to ask her, and had not quite made up their poor old minds to ask her husband too, or to be so discourteous as to invite her alone.

How easy everything had become! She wrote a gay acceptance, a gay apology for Kingsland, and fell to her packing. Molly could go home for her holiday, and Wagtail could look after Pillicock and the house. It was all so easy! It almost convinced one that if you let things alone they would work out by themselves in the best possible way. Look at Gibbs. Suppose she had made up her mind to marry Gibbs? She shuddered. And he, with the small sister he was so fond of—he hadn't wanted his mother, nor yet the efficient elder sister; she was sure she was right about that. Things had worked out for him so as to give him what he needed and what he really wanted, except when he had been momentarily carried off his feet by some silly . . . How much had he been unconsciously influenced by the idea of inheriting the practice, and the surgery, and the daughter? He did not know, she was sure; nor did she; and she was not disposed to pursue the subject.

But laying out underwear, she remembered Jack. Jack,

now, he was going to marry well. Every one said so. The girl had family, money enough to save her own pride—he had more than enough for two—and she hunted and loved sports. Just the life for them both: as soon as he had got rid of his silly idea. But she had to admit to herself that she had rather taken choice out of Jack's hands. No matter now; his troubles would soon be over, too. . . .

She laid down an armful of lingerie: "No, it would not. It would be going on for him just as it was for her. He would have his problems of moment by moment, so would Gibbs. One was always forgetting that other people's problems mattered to them quite as much as . . ."

It was an interesting idea; but she couldn't miss her train for it. Her problem now was to spend a fortnight happily at Torquay with a short-tempered uncle and a tatting aunt and a husband occupied with unknown people.

Molly came up with an armful of linen from the wash.

"Molly," said the mistress, "you'd better stay and hand me things as I want them. Top drawer now—the gloves and handkerchiefs. That's right. You've a quick brain. Do you do much thinking, Molly?"

"Thinkin', 'm? Well, a body has to think to do any work."

"Now the shoes—yes, those—and those; and the silver slippers. Right. . . . What do you think about first thing in the morning?"

"Why, breakfast," said Molly.

"And after breakfast? You'll find the stockings—yes, you know where."

"Why, there's all the work, to be sure; the dishes, and the beds, and the sweeping, and dusting. . . ."

"Do you remember where my sponge-bag is? Oh, thanks. Yes, and then?"

"Then there's lunch," said Molly; "not to speak of being

bothered by the grocer and Wagtail trackin' dirt into my clean kitchen and all."

"Isn't there any more of this soap? Oh, dear. I mustn't forget. . . . Yes, and after lunch?"

"Well, by the time the dishes is cleared away and one thing and another, it isn't so long until tea-time, now is it, mum? And there's your black dress to be got into and maybe a bit o' mendin', and your cap and apron and all."

"Now I'll have the dresses—yes, the blue and the black; yes, that one. I shan't need so many in a fortnight. . . . And you were saying? After tea?"

Molly was beginning to look suspicious. If she was thinking now, her thought was: What would the Missis be getting at?

But she answered politely: "Well, between tea and dinner, mum, you knows yourself, there's just no time at all, what with your joint and your vegetables, and all the things that has to be thought of. . . ."

"And then," said Olwen, "when the dishes are washed there's the evening. Do you do much thinking then, Molly?"

Molly blushed—not pink, a painful red: "When I'm let, mum," she answered.

Yes, thought Olwen, but you don't like to be let, you little minx! She had not been very successful so far in getting at Molly's mind. She tried again: "And, of course, there's Sunday."

"Yes, 'm," said Molly demurely. "Is this dress to go, 'm?"

"Sunday," said Olwen, "is a day for walking out."

Molly twisted her hands in her apron and made no reply. The blush had not yet gone. "My little bag," said Olwen.

"And at the end of the day one goes to bed and sleeps, and that's all." She was really talking to herself now, not to the girl, who stood by, holding the small leather bag.

"I'm always sleepy of a night," said Molly. "And mornings! Lard! if it wasn't for the alarm . . ."

"But you'll be married some day," said Olwen, still to herself, "and then it will go on just like this—on and on. . . ."

"Please, 'm, no, it won't," Molly was eager now. "It'll be different, like."

"How different?"

"Well, it won't not be a grand place like this; only a little bit of a 'ome of me own [Gwen once more!]. And on Monday there'll be the washin' to do—I must do me own washin', then, mum; and Tuesday the ironin'; and there'll be the cleanin' and scrubbin'; and the children 'ill be trackin' in the dirt and tearin' their clothes. . . ."

"You seem to have thought a lot about it," said Olwen.

"No, 'm, but I had eight brothers and sisters," said Molly meekly.

Nine, then! And the mother an early widow. Olwen hardly needed to ask that. But they were all doing well, Molly urged, all but those what was dead—Muriel and Phyllis and Albert and the baby what they hadn't time to christen—they all had good jobs and was sending home a bit to mother.

"But I hope you're saving?" Olwen asked. "Have you got a bottom drawer?"

The blush again: "Yes, 'm, thank you, 'm; I save what I can; yes 'm, thank you, 'm." That was about the bottom drawer, of course.

Olwen rose from her knees: "So you don't have many troubles to keep you awake nights, and you don't have to waste time thinking. . . . What's the matter?"

For Molly was buried in tears and half smothered in her own apron.

"There, there, tell me," Olwen soothed her. "I'll help you if I can. But take your apron down, there's a good girl. I can't hear a word you say."

"Nobody can't 'elp me," said Molly, obeying as to the apron, but letting large tears roll down her cheeks, and wiping them off with her sleeve when she remembered.

"Perhaps I can," said Olwen gently. "I know what trouble is. But I can't unless you tell me. It's your young man, of course."

"No, 'm," said Molly. "It's two on 'em."

"Two what?" Olwen did not at once understand.

"It's the grocer's young man 'ere, and one at Bristol. Well, 'e's a porter on the railway, like. . . . And all the while I've been walking out 'ere, I keep a-gettin' letters from 'im. And, oh, Miss, 'e's been a-buyin' of the furniture. And Garge, 'ere, now 'e's begun to talk about the banns and all. . . ."

"Well; which of them do you want?" asked Olwen.

"That's just what I don't know, Miss."

"Suppose," said Olwen, "one of them had to die and you could say which you could do without. . . . ?"

"Oh, but nothing of that kind wouldn't never 'appen, 'm," said Molly. "It would be wicked!"

"But just suppose," persisted Olwen. "Can't you suppose?"

Molly only gaped.

"Suppose George, now—suppose George—suppose his horse ran away and he fell and broke his neck?"

Molly suppressed a scream in her apron.

"Or suppose the porter—what's his name? Oh, Bob? Suppose Bob stumbled and got under a train?"

Molly suppressed another scream.

"You can't marry them both, you know," said Olwen. "It's not permitted."

"As if I'd . . ."

"No, you wouldn't think of it. Well, then, you'll have to make up your mind, or toss a penny, or let them fight it out. I don't see any other way."

"Fight?" said Molly. The idea stopped the tears. Like all women, the minx! She couldn't help it.

"But I don't recommend that. You might find yourself without either. Don't worry. It will settle itself. Here am I

keeping you back with your work. I shall not get off today if you don't run."

So there was poor Molly, shedding secret tears over a future of which she had no control; and when it came—whichever it was to be—she would have far more cause for tears than she dreamed of now. But it wouldn't make the least difference to any one which man she married, or whether she married at all.

That was the way of life. It must mean something. One would find out some day what it meant.

Meanwhile?

L. AT LAND'S END, GOING ON AND ON

THE seaside boarding-house where Olwen found her aunt and uncle was a new kind of life for her, and she was frankly inquisitive about its oddities. The mask-like faces of old people she had never noticed before: the poor old women, scored with wrinkles, sometimes pitifully plastered over; the old men, bald and with empurpled veins; and all of them stiff and sighing with many complaints, their eyes so covered in with flesh that there was no knowing what went on behind. Did anything go on behind? The claw-fingers, heavily ringed, of the old women were always busy with needlework, and their tongues with their own and their neighbours' affairs; and the old men were avid of newspapers.

No doubt her uncle and aunt fitted into the group. They had gone to some such place every summer since they were married, usually to the East Coast. They had deflected their way to Torquay, Olwen reasoned, this summer, on her account. And as for change, they might as well be in Gower Street. Uncle Simon fumed over his morning toast and the timing of his egg; and when the morning paper was read from end to end, each day became one long Sunday without the diversion of church. Aunt Victoria, who alone among the old women still wore a rag of lace as apology for a cap, tatted without intermission, and talked, when she talked, about things that might be happening to the London house while they were away.

Olwen was glad that, at least, they were not closely in-

quisitive about her; and when the flatness of the place shut down like a lid, she ran away alone and found a corner for herself on the beach. She had a particular cove—a niche of sand under a shady bank, fringed by blue sea-thistles, where no one ever came. There she often sat in the morning for an hour or two before her relatives began to miss her.

But one morning when she fled to her retreat she stopped in annoyance: it was occupied.

The occupant was a grey-haired, grey-bearded man, in rough greyish tweeds with a conspicuous red tie and no hat. He sat hugging his knees and smoking a well-seasoned pipe with an air of great content.

He was quick, though. The moment Olwen appeared his pipe was out of his mouth, and he was asking: "This your corner? I'll be off."

He was curiously birdlike—hawk-nosed, bright-eyed, alert; a gay and ruddy young fellow who had powdered his hair and beard. Remembering the pasty-faced and bloated old age she had left at the breakfast table, Olwen was aware of a sudden strong desire to know more about him.

"I don't mind if you don't," she smiled at him. "It's quite a large cove."

He held up his pipe inquiringly: "I'm on the right side of the wind if you sit over there."

"My husband smokes," she answered, and settled herself in the sand.

"Well, I shan't trouble you long. When I've finished this pipeful I shall be on my way. I'm walking to the Land's End."

"Land's End? Walking? What for?"

"For fun, of course. What else?"

There was an old age for you!

"But why Land's End?"

He puffed several times before replying: "Why not? I'm

generally walking somewhere. There's no way like walking to see life. And I've never been along this part of the coast."

"And when you get to Land's End, do you jump off, or come back?"

"According to the way I feel. But I've never jumped off yet. More likely I'll come back another way—the north coast. And when I get tired of that, home!"

"Alone?" asked Olwen in amazement.

"I used to have a little dog, but when he died I didn't get me another. They made so much trouble about him at the inns. Besides, it would be a queer thing if a man couldn't be company for himself."

"Most people don't think that," said Olwen.

He took the pipe from his mouth and stared at her from under grizzled eyebrows: "Will you tell me why things go in couples in this world?"

"Would it be because they came out of the Ark that way?" she asked naughtily.

But he was serious: "That would be as good a reason as some I've heard."

"It's easy to see you're not married," she said.

"Wrong! I married at twenty-three. And I've had kids—two: the girl's married and living in America; the boy . . . buried at Verdun. And my wife stood me till I retired from practice—I'm a doctor—and took to the roads like this. Now we go our own ways. She breeds canaries. I go home occasionally. . . . It works."

"One can see that it does for you," she commented.

"So we come back to the original problem—why two?"

"You're a doctor," said Olwen. "You won't deny that men are men and women are women, and that neither can have the same point of view as the other. There's a reason for two-ness, isn't there?"

"Only so far as to keep the world populated—to my way

of thinking. But when that's cared for three's better than two, and perhaps four than three."

"There's the body and the soul, if you want another two," Olwen still argued.

"Is there? Well, I can't separate them," he answered quietly.

This was so astonishing that it required thinking about. She put it aside and went on: "What is it, after all, then, that people live by?"

"Bread," he answered. "And butter if they can get it."

"That isn't what I mean. You put me off," she said.

"Not at all," he said. "A good digestion and something to digest—two-thirds of life. The other third seems to be out of our hands."

"Go on," she encouraged him. "It interests me."

"Most people think I'm mad. But I don't mind that. I've got to stand by my own ideas, or I shouldn't be anywhere."

"I haven't found mine yet," she answered.

"It takes time; they grow with the body. Everybody except the fools who rush through life too busy to think grows ideas about life and its meaning."

"Then there's hope for me," she said lightly, but wanting him to say more. "Since we have to live, whether we like or not, it's natural to want to be happy."

"Well, what's to prevent?"

"All sorts of things—all the time."

"Nothing. Nothing can prevent you from being happy if you want to."

"But suppose—suppose you lost all the things you care for?"

"Then find others. It's all the same."

"But it isn't!" she said vehemently. "If you lose what belongs to you, you—you don't want anything else."

"There are two answers to that," he said. "In the first place, you can't lose what belongs to you. If you lose it, it didn't belong to you. In the second place . . ."

But she did not want to hear about the second place: "How do you know?"

"Stands to reason. See this sand. Suppose you were starving. Should you eat it? No. Sand is very good stuff, but it doesn't belong to you, and you can't take it in. Same thing with ideas. You can't take one in unless it belongs to you."

"And—people?" she asked. "Relationships?"

"It's a bit hard to explain," he said slowly, fiddling with his pipe. "You eat grapes because you like 'em, and they become a part of you; same with books—music—painting. You take 'em when there's something in you ready for 'em—see what I mean? But relationships are the devil. Of course you may outgrow your ideas and tastes—even for grapes. But they don't make a fuss about it. With relationships, there's the other side to be considered. You may outgrow your children or they may outgrow you; in either case it's awkward. . . . And friendships—how many friendships worth the keeping last a lifetime? . . . One has to face that. . . ."

"Yes? Yes?" she was breathless.

He emptied his pipe with a gesture that reminded her of her father; it seemed that he was preparing to go. But he looked at her again and picked up a handful of sand, letting it slowly dribble back through his fingers. "Small stuff," he said.

She fumbled for his idea: "You mean—we are?"

"Are we? Take one grain—so. Hold it between your thumb and finger—so. Not so small—eh? Take another and another. What do you see?"

"Iridescent spider webs—all different. Not so small. . . ."

"There you are. Who knows the size of them? And marvellously put together. Lying in countless millions over the earth and at the bottom of the sea. Nothing to do with me as I hold them in my hand—yet somehow related. For here and there they get shaped into plants—and the plants into

beasts—and the beasts into men. . . . All somehow related. . . . All made out of a something almost too small to be imagined. . . . The shaping force? . . . They call it God. . . .

"Or take it the other way. Call the earth an electron; the solar universe an atom; all the universes we know anything about—a grain of sand. Something behind them all. . . . God is the name we use. . . .

"Fact is, we can think away something at least of the pressure of space; perhaps something of time. Relationship's the thing.

"And in relationship, what have you got but yourself? . . . And what's that? A new compound of old ancestors? Something that would fly into dust—literally—if the pressure of the air were lifted? Doesn't seem much, does it? But it's here—you know that, at least—and what are you going to do with it? . . . You don't have much choice, seems to me. The moment you're born, you begin to draw in air and tuck in food and drink, and to give them back again, used up. Not much choice about that. You either do it, or you stop—and there's an end, so far as you know. . . .

"Well, the baby's in the right of it, seems to me; he takes everything he can get—all the time—and has as much fun as he can, all the time. Why not? What's better?

"And it doesn't stop there. Growing—what's growing? Taking more and more of everything you can take and building it into yourself—isn't it? If you can't get one thing, take another. Why not—if relationship's the thing?"

"But sometimes it hurts badly."

"Growing pains—you get over them. We all do."

"Relationship. . . ." she mused.

"Funny thing. Here we sit, the two of us, in relationship. Yesterday we were strangers; tomorrow there will be only memory. But at this moment there's nothing alive for either of us but the meaning that passes between us. What is it?

. . . I don't know. . . . Where I come out is, that there isn't much difference after all between the you and the me, or any you and any me—or even—they think I'm mad—whether it's between people or between people and things. . . . We're mostly asleep most of the time, anyway. There's only a small flicker of the self alive at a time, playing with another small flicker of somebody or something outside itself— That makes relationship, I suppose. And it doesn't seem to matter what you play with, so you keep on. The interest's the thing. . . ."

"You use *interest* in a strange sense," she said.

"I use it as a synonym for living; I know no other. I believe I have grown old enough to be interested in every mortal thing that comes my way. When one can feel like that, it is impossible to be dissatisfied with life."

"Yes—and then it ends," she said.

"Does it? How do you know?"

"Well, at least, you end as the person you are now."

"There are several answers to that. One is: not much cause for regret there. I wonder whether there is anybody in this world who would like to go to heaven just as he is, with all his faults and imperfections? If you admit one change—one only—your whole fabric of identity is gone. You couldn't tell where to stop. That's one answer.

"Here's another. You're not the same physically that you were as a child. It may be all nonsense about complete replacement every seven years. But it's certain every atom of the body is being replaced all the time in the process of growth. Where do they come from, these outside atoms? Can you tell me that? Who directs each atom to its place and its function? For lack of a better name, I am willing to call it God. But the point of main interest is that the pattern is preserved. If this can be done once, why not again? Why not as often as desired, whoever does the desiring?"

"Well, but who does?"

"As I see it, the things that belong together go together, without intervention of time or space."

"I don't see that." She was troubled.

"I don't remember the speed of an atom, but it has been determined. It practically annihilates space. A freed atom could make its way to any part of this earth in a fraction of time so minute as to seem instantaneous. Did you know that?"

She shook her head.

"That being so, I see no reason why we shouldn't begin to live again the moment we are what is called dead. I don't trouble myself much about the how. Why shouldn't the finest parts of us assemble themselves in new shapes? Why shouldn't the earthy parts of us remain earth? Earth is important as a foundation—we should be badly off without it, as things are—but it's also a clog to the parts that are finer than air. Redistribution—that's the solution for me. I'm not in a hurry to be pulled apart, because I'm having all the living there is now, this minute; but when the time comes I shall know that, after a brief and more or less disagreeable transition—death, you know; but birth is equally unpleasant—I shall be in for some new game."

"I can't think it out now," said Olwen, "but it seems to me like—oh, like a key that might unlock many doors."

"Unless you begin to think it out for yourself, by tomorrow it will look to you—as it does to most people to whom I let myself talk—like the vapourings of a lunatic. But that's no matter. Luckily the universe doesn't depend upon my thinking. If I'm right, it will go on, even if people don't know; if I'm wrong, it will go on its own way; and at least it's made life a good thing for me."

"I can see that," she said eagerly. "I can even see how. But I don't know whether it could for me."

"Not till you live it," he said. "Now you're merely seeing it with your top layer of consciousness—your brain. You've

got to live it with your whole body before it really means anything."

"How does one begin?" she asked.

He jumped to his feet—really jumped; and as he brushed and shook the sand from his rough clothes he looked down at her, with a certain compassion in his eyes: "My dear child, I wish I could tell you. You either see it or you don't. And till you see it, you don't. No one can tell you how to begin."

"That's rather hard, isn't it?"

"Perhaps. But I didn't make it so. After you see you don't find it hard."

"Oh, but don't go just yet"—for he was moving off. "You're not in great haste, are you? There's more I want to ask; and, as you said, we may never meet again."

"I'm not in haste, certainly," he answered. "I'm rarely that. There's no particular reason why I should be in Dartmouth today. But I thought you had probably had as much as you wanted."

"No, I'm in the middle; and that's a bad place to stop . . ."

"I'm not so sure," he demurred. "You might be more likely to worry it through."

She disregarded that: "You see, it all seems so—so impersonal; and women live in personalities."

He admitted that: "They have the habit. Ages of child-bearing and child-breeding, I suppose."

"But we can't change ourselves."

"Not in one lifetime. Well, put your special problem."

That was hard to do. But he was a stranger. She would never see him again. And he had said, that each moment was unique—only one chance. . . .

"It's the husband, of course," he said, looking at her shrewdly.

"Not altogether. Before we were married, there was—I felt

all the time as if there was something in me that wanted to get out."

"Growing pains, that. But didn't it get out when you married?"

"It did and it didn't," she answered. "It doesn't stay out—or in."

"No children, of course," he asserted, and did not wait for her reply: "If you had children you'd be content—at least while they're young. You'd think you alone had the secret of living. As they grow up new adjustments have to be made. Most women think marriage is the whole solution of life and the only one for them—and it is when they've got no brains to speak of. Plenty of them are purely vegetative. But it's the brains that make trouble."

"One seems to have just enough brains to get into trouble, and not enough to get out."

"I told you before, you can't think out; you've got to live out. Yes, yes, I know, it takes time. But you've got time—all there is."

"How much is there?" she asked foolishly.

"None at all, if you don't want it. We make it, don't we? Well, then, you can take as much as you like, or none at all."

She thought that quibbling. "The point is, it's very difficult to be a good wife."

"Does your husband want you to be a good wife?"

"I don't know what he wants. I don't in the least know him; and the more I see of him, the less I understand."

He chuckled: "I won't press that; or it might seem to follow that if you really care about understanding him you'd better not see him at all."

"That would be a hard choice," she said, disturbed.

"Is it the Chinese—or who?—that say if you really want the best of love you must keep away from the loved one?"

"Oh, what a bitter doctrine!" She was almost sobbing.

He caressed a soft blue thistle on the bank a little as he replied: "The spectacle of many husbands and wives almost inclines one to believe it."

She laid her face on her knees in a kind of despair.

He gently stroked the blossom in silence.

"It isn't that he doesn't care for me"—her eyes were tear-wet, but defiant.

"No. Or you for him. It's nothing but the wear and tear of daily life—tied. If you lashed two young trees together, neither would grow all round."

"But there must be some way . . . ?"

"The looser the knot, the better," he said drily. "But that's only palliative."

"There's more than that to it," she said suddenly. "As far as I can see, the men don't want to be tied at all, and the women don't want anything else."

"Well, there you are." He bit meditatively at a long blade of grass as if to try the taste of it. "That's Nature. What's the cure for Nature?"

"I suppose," she said, "one might try to feel more detached. . . ."

His smile was heart-warming: "One might."

"Perhaps one could—how shall I put it?—break up and distribute one's centre of interest. . . . One might keep on trying to find other things—outside things. . . ."

"Things? You can't escape 'em. Hitting you in the eye all day long."

"But suppose you can't make yourself interested in them if—when—when you are troubled about . . ."

"But, good Lord! why shouldn't you be? You've got eyes and ears and a brain. The mere spectacle of this silly old world should keep one amused for seventy-odd years."

"It seems to me now as if I almost get the idea," she said

slowly. "As if the trouble comes from tying yourself up to one thing instead of letting go and spreading out—taking and giving with everything that comes one's way. . . ."

"That's it." He wagged his beard.

"The mere feeling of an endless continuity, of belonging to everything that is, of being a part of something, of pushing on and helping on. . . ."

"That's it, girl; you've got it."

She looked up ruefully: "But it won't stay. I've thought a little like that before—never so clearly as you've put it. It doesn't last. When things are wrong with *us,* thinking like this doesn't help a bit. When *we're* all right, I know what people mean by heaven."

"Nobody means anything by heaven," he retorted brusquely, as if he was disappointed in her. "Take away all human qualities, and you've nothing left but a lot of white paper dolls in gilt crowns, trying to sing before a white-bearded God. Nobody wants that. What they want is more life on earth, more and more life on this blessed old earth that will not be exhausted within the imagination of man. And the dickens of it is, that's what they've got before them—if they only knew."

She shook her head obstinately: "I want my husband as he is when—when we do understand."

"Well, what's to prevent you from working to get that as often as possible?"

"And when I can't?"

"Try again."

But she looked discouraged. He asked, with a change of tone: "Tell me now, if you could have him made immortal, just as he is—without one change? . . . Ah, you've told me. And how about yourself? I thought not. You don't want to go on playing the same old parts in the drama to the end of time."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Well, believing as I do that nothing's lost in the economy of this universe, you've got to believe that you either go on as the same, or that you're allowed to change—at least, to improve—your parts by remaking. How can you? Relationship's the key. That's all life is, anyway, as we said before. If you make your relationships from day to day, from moment to moment . . . ?"

He was coming near now—near.

"Yes?" she said eagerly.

"That's your job for what we commonly call this life. And what do you make them of, these relationships? Whatever is at hand. If you can't get one thing, you take another. If you lose the one thing you love best—no matter what it is—you say to yourself, 'It will come back to me, or it wasn't mine. I can wait. What shall I play with while I'm waiting?' That sounds a bit too much like preaching. But no matter for that. If it's true, you'll live into it."

She laid her face on her knees again, looking sideways at the deep blue, unruffled sea.

"Take your time," said the deep, kind voice. "Take your time. Remember, you've got everything there is."

There was a silence, broken only by the soft rustle of the wind among the stiff-leaved thistles and sparse blades of grass.

"Tell me . . ." she said, lifting her face.

But there was no one there. There was no one on the beach as far as she could look, in either direction.

"Oh, you must tell me!" She jumped to her feet and tried to scramble up the sandy bank. At first it seemed impossible. She fell continually backwards with the loosened sand, in her hands the stalks of loosely-rooted grasses.

But she set her teeth and tried, gaining ground by inches. She was not longer than a very few moments in reaching the

top of the hillock; but there was no one in sight but a white-clad nursemaid, holding by the hand two small children who screamed at her.

"Did you see an old man . . . ?" gasped Olwen; and knowing that she would only lose time by her questions, began to run.

The coarse grass that tripped and tangled her feet grew short and smooth. She came out on a road; but there was no house into which he could have vanished. She must find him —she could not let him go like that, with so much more to be answered. She remembered that he was for the Land's End, and she turned westward, running as best she could.

She had gone a long way before she met a carter driving an empty cart, coming from the westward. He had seen no such person as she described.

There she was, on a hot summer morning, wet with perspiration, spent with running, all her labour lost; nothing to do but go home. Back to the people who had never learned how to live.

She began to hurry on as before, but eastward, till she pulled up herself sharply: it seemed almost like an echo of the deep, kind voice: "Take your time, my dear. You have everything there is."

If it were true—*if* it were true—there was nothing to do but live. Yes. Live and grow. So he had said. He said he could not help her to see. But if it came, she would know. It had come. It was now.

She could begin to live now—this moment. There was nothing to stop her; nothing to make her unhappy. Being unhappy was like being ill—you didn't have to unless you enjoyed it. She had everything, and she had it *now*. . . .

But would it last?

It would last while it lasted. She had it now. . . .

The remainder of her stay she was very gentle and quiet, thinking, all the while, thinking. . . .

Wherever she went, she looked for an old man in grey with a scarlet tie, and she asked questions about him; but she could not find him or hear of him. She fancied him plodding along the cliffs, sitting at Land's End, going on and on. . . .

LI. AND SHUT THE DOOR

IT WAS August before Kingsland returned; but she did not mind that. She was not lonely; she had her new idea to live into. And as the old man had said, things hit her in the eye all day long. There were the sweet peas which had to be gathered in sheaves daily, to keep them from shrivelling up and sulking and refusing to blossom at all; there were the carnations and pinks and streaked gillyflowers and the early asters. . . . Everywhere in the garden there was outcry for her attention. And Wagtail with his stories; it was so long since he had had her ear. And Pillicock, who brought a rabbit almost as large as himself and laid it in pride at her feet. And Molly, whose love affairs had not disentangled themselves. And the house that needed looking after here and there. And the neighbours who came and went. And the patient trees in the Forest deserted by her for the barren sea. . . .

One night, as she stood at the garden door, not thinking, merely breathing the sweet air and looking at the curve of the young moon, her silence was broken by the grate of a stopping car. Her husband came in, calling "Olwen! Olwen!" in high spirits.

In high spirits as she had never seen him before. He said he hadn't been able to stay away another day—or night. Besides, the Gorings had gone to Scotland. They had invited him, but he had better things to do. The great news was, he had written another play. Mrs. Goring had given him the

idea—a little sparkler of a woman she was. And somehow the atmosphere had been just right—everything had been just right. . . . It was only a one-act piece; but he had read it to them, and they had all sworn it was a winner. More than that, they had connections with the Old Vic. They were going to see what they could do with the play. They had it now. . . .

"Miss Weston?" Olwen asked. "Miss Allardyce Weston?"

Oh, that woman! No! She was playing in the States somewhere, last thing he had heard. These people would get a proper hearing for the piece; it looked now as if his foot were on the bottom rung of the ladder. . . .

She told him how glad she was—how glad with all her heart; told him so several times.

Yes, but not glad enough, he insisted.

Then she strained her gladness until it seemed unreal. She was most honestly glad; but the affair did not seem so important now. . . .

After a time, as they sat on the step together, she said: "I did not know before that you were so ambitious."

"Nor I," he answered. "But, after all, it's ambition that's the saving of men, isn't it?"

"I suppose it must be," she pondered.

"It's next best to . . ."

There was the breathless heaven again, for a moment—one more golden moment for the storehouse of memory. . . .

It faded. He was full of plans. If the piece was accepted they would begin rehearsing; in September probably. He would have to go up. A bore, of course; but unless the author kept his eye on the rehearsing he hardly knew his work when it came out. . . .

"And when it's ready, my girl, you'll be coming up for the first performance. If it's no go—very likely it won't be—your job will be to collect the fragments of the playwright and bring them down here to be mended."

"And if it is a go?"

"If it is a go, we'll keep Christmas! We'll have the Gorings —no, I forget: they're sailing for the States. He's got some fat commission over there. . . ."

It was extraordinary to see him so changed, and by so small a breath of success; but of course she could not imagine how it felt to write.

"And we'll restore the house with the proceeds." She tried to fit into his mood.

Of course, it was wonderful to have him again; yet it was not so wonderful as she had, dreaming, thought it would be.

It was partly, she decided presently, the little things—the continual little daily things—the most surprising things. For example, omelets. Who would have thought omelets could give one a moment's breath of unhappiness?

But one morning he was grumbling at the eternal eggs and bacon and expressing a wish for one of Mary's omelets.

"Mary's?" she asked.

"Oh, I forgot. We always used given names there—Mrs. Goring's. She made the best omelets I ever . . ."

"But we can have them," she said.

"Molly's?" He shrugged. "She'd pepper 'em with lead."

"No, mine. I can make a decent omelet myself," she said irritably. "If you'd deigned to let me know you liked them for breakfast. I judged by what you ordered in Town. I'll make you one tomorrow."

"Oh, what's the good of bothering about a stray remark?" He was irritated in turn.

She said nothing, but he might have seen her lips go closer together. The next morning she rose early and arrived at the breakfast table some minutes after he had gone down, but with the omelet. She was sure it was quite as good as any "Mary" had produced.

But if she waited for praise, she waited in vain; he ate

behind *The Times,* apparently unaware that he was not having his usual breakfast.

When he folded his paper—"Well, have you finished?"—she knew she ought to have had the strength of mind to keep silence, and found herself asking, quite as if something depended upon the answer, "Was it good?"

"What?"

"The omelet?"

"Oh, that. Yes. Very."

It was certainly not worth while to ask whether it was as good as "Mary's." It was better to watch Pillicock trying to make up his mind whether or not he liked the dish.

After breakfast Kingsland used to shut himself in the transformed surgery. She had never got to the point of showing the various ways in which she had tried to make it convenient and pleasant; but one day he had strolled in and evidently decided that it would do, and so adopted it.

How much he worked there she did not know; for once she had made the mistake of asking whether he had got on well. It seemed that the mere question endangered the mood. But if one could judge from the pipe—he had once said he thought with his pipe—something was being accomplished.

When the luncheon gong rang she never waited more than five minutes. Usually he came in silence and the meal passed almost in silence, except for the commonplaces. For two or three days she had tried to find topics of conversation; but the results did not seem to pay for the effort. She fancied he was relieved to be let alone.

Now and then he would come in a kind of glee, announcing of his own will that perhaps that morning had not been wasted. After several weeks she began to observe a certain coincidence between these days of high spirits and the arrival of letters. She wondered, without particular emotion, whether they were from Scotland.

One day, at least, this was true; a letter of his was brought by mistake among her own, and she had read the postmark before she noticed that the envelope was not addressed to her. She wondered whether she ought to take it to the study at once. After some consideration, she decided that it might be best to do so.

When, at his "Come in," she entered, he was sprawling, pipe in mouth, in a big comfortable easy chair that she had gone to Gloucester to buy and had chosen only after many rejections. His frown said more plainly than words, "What on earth do you mean by disturbing my thoughts?"

She held out the letter: "It was brought among mine. I thought you might want it."

He was eager in a moment: "Oh, it's from Mary! Right you are. She'll give me a lift."

At luncheon he told her the new play was going with a whiz.

Then she felt jealousy clawing in every vein. Omelets had not mattered; but if this Mary was to be the inspiration of his work . . .

She pushed away her plate, and looking at her clasped hands, said: "So Mary did give you a lift?"

"She's a wonder, that little woman!" he answered. "Too good for that lazy Goring. But she keeps pecking at him till he does his jobs. Owes all he is to her."

"And now she's—pecking at you?" asked Olwen.

He laughed: "Not pecking, my dear. That happens only between wives and husbands."

"Do I peck?"

"No, you're not that variety. You're the mothering kind. Always wanting to hover and do things."

"Which is bad for work, of course."

"Well, it doesn't help. The best thing for work is to be let alone."

"But you just said that Mrs. Goring . . . ?"

"Yes. I don't know how she does it. Sort of stimulates your appetite for work. A kind of pepper, perhaps."

"Pepper," said Olwen. "And what am I?"

"Sugar and spice and everything nice," he said, coming round the table to be affectionate.

"Everything but—pepper." She did not respond to his caress.

"Well, it's easy to get too much pepper," he retorted.

"And you don't like sweets at all. So there we are." She rose.

"Arguing by analogy is always dangerous," he said, leaving her. "What the dickens should you like to be?"

She knew her answer, but she did not speak it: "Daily bread." She did not want his comment. As he said, arguing by analogy was dangerous.

The August days were long. She filled them as best she could. In five or six weeks more, she remembered, he might be going up to town for an indefinite time, for the rehearsal of his play. Her heart seemed to drop whenever she thought of it, yet even as it dropped there was an intangible, barely perceptible sense of relief. At least she would not be able to think about the closed study door, to wish vainly that she might be helping on the other side, or to wonder in what mood the occupant would come out.

Afternoons, now and then, his manner invited suggestions for their amusement together; but she never seemed to be able to propose the right thing at the right time. If she spoke of a drive, it appeared that he was sick of the Forest roads and too tired to go farther. If she proposed reading, he asked, "What?" At first she tried to think of things: "Congreve? Wycherley? Sheridan?"—she soon got to the limit of her knowledge. And all these, it then appeared, and many more, had been read aloud during his stay with the Gorings.

"We never finished *Romeo,*" she said one day.

His answer was: "I'm trying to write a comedy."

That day she had left him soon after and gone up to her room and wept behind the locked door. What hurt so desperately, she thought, was that she had not known even that fact until then. As for Torquay, had she dreamed the whole great experience? One could think, one could pretend; but as for feeling. . . . Yet when his mood permitted, they had happy times together.

And September came.

As Olwen tore the August leaf from the calendar she found it suddenly crumpled in her clenched fist. Her thoughts were flying wildly, like birds before a storm: "That old man—he was wrong. He doesn't know. I've thought I was getting on, and I've only been counting the days until he goes away again. Oh, this business of living! this business of living!"

With a sigh she dropped on a footstool—the little old footstool he had kicked about in annoyance one day. She had not meant to remember; but memory is no handmaid to the will.

If you couldn't think a thing through, and you couldn't live it through, what else was there?

The obtrusive answer to her question was the little idiot of a Pillicock, who sat himself down before her, attentive, with such a perfect air of asking, "Well, what do we do next?" that she had to laugh.

Pillicock was one of the things one didn't notice enough when one was absorbed in a husband.

Absorbed? What a hideous thought! One mustn't be absorbed. All very well; but it was impossible to forget when you knew he was in the house, when he might at any moment come or call, and when you would have to think quickly to do the right thing—and even then commonly did the wrong. . . .

What was there about the man—about any man, for the matter of that?

Pillicock wouldn't budge for him. If he called Pillicock, would Pillicock go loping? Not he; more likely to turn his back. Pillicock did not care for man or devil—except when accompanied by a food dish. Then he was willing to beg and even to whine a little, unworthy as it was of his dignity.

But the point was, Pillicock preserved his independence. How if she . . . ? Suppose when he wanted to read she insisted that they go for a drive. She could get her way; but the drive would hardly be pleasant. Suppose when he wanted to drive she should refuse? He would go without her, and enjoy himself quite as much. That was being independent. . . .

It seemed that there were two things to be done at the same time, and to bring them together one had to be two people at once. Anthony and Pillicock, they were much alike in this—never bothered. If they wanted something, or didn't want it, they said so unmistakably; and they saw no reason why they should not have exactly what they wanted when they wanted it, and not have it when they didn't want it. Well, it was easy enough to imitate that. But the other thing was that somebody had to give way to them, or there would be no relationship. There couldn't be relationship unless somebody created it; and neither he nor Pillicock would move a step or yield an inch. They didn't, in fact, want relationship.. All they wanted was this or that for the moment; and the rest of the time they went back to their own devices. That was the point. You couldn't establish a series of relationships if the other person wanted nothing but disconnected experiences. If you tried, you only got hurt. . . .

The old man had said you didn't have to be hurt: you were unhappy only if you liked it. Oh, it was not true! Still you couldn't make Pillicock unhappy, unless you actually hurt him. If you starved him or beat him. . . . Suffering—yes, there was plenty of that among men and beasts. "If I trod on Pillicock's foot, he'd squeal with the pain. More than that,

he'd go and sulk and glower at me all the morning. But he wouldn't have to glower, the old man would say. He'd be a happier cat if he didn't. . . . Oh, go away, you silly beast! You distract me. I keep thinking about you, and it's not you I have on my mind at all. . . ."

He went, and promptly; but that was only because he wanted to. If he had felt like it, he'd have stayed. . . .

She had no illusions about Pillicock's love for her. Perhaps it would be as well to get rid of other . . .

And then—just then—the cause of her disturbance came up behind, and, in the shape of a man, softly tweaked her ear, saying, "Tell me your thoughts, my nut-brown maid."

She decided that she would: "I was just wondering what on earth I see in you."

He laughed more heartily than she had ever heard him: he had to sit down on a chair to laugh. She did not like him when he laughed that way.

"My dear child, I've been wondering that ever since we were married—and long before. Come now, don't keep it a secret. Tell me. Honestly, I don't know."

"Unfortunately, I don't either," she said.

"I'm not the kind women buzz about . . ." he was beginning.

"Nevertheless, there have been others." She smiled, with a little impertinent nod.

"Oh, every man—not now."

"Not even—Mary?"

"Good Lord, you aren't jealous of her!" He seemed astounded.

She did not answer for a moment: "Only—that she seems to be able to help you—when I can't."

"That's no ground for jealousy. You never can tell what's going to give the lift. It might be Molly, or Wagtail, or the postman."

"That's it," she answered softly. "It seems to be usually the postman."

He reddened: "I didn't mean that. I wasn't thinking of letters. I was thinking of the pot-hatted fellow himself. He might give me an idea any day. There's no telling. You can't know beforehand where you're going to pick up an idea."

"I suppose, not being literary I don't understand these things."

He was still annoyed: "Well, you can take it from me that you've no cause to be jealous of Mary Goring. I'd like to be able to be friends with a pretty, charming little woman, who spills over an idea to me now and then, without having you feel . . ."

"But surely," she said, with conviction. Yet she still felt the claws.

"And you haven't told me yet what you see in me. I'm bad-tempered, uncertain, about as selfish as they make 'em. . . ."

"Oh, no!" she said earnestly.

"You can't knock over the truth with protests. Besides, I'm not uneasy about my faults. All I wonder is, how you can stick 'em."

"I've enough of my own," she said humbly. "You might tell me what you see in me."

He shook his head: "They get us in spite of ourselves."

"Who do?"

"Whoever it is that makes people demand one another. And when they've had their fun. . . ."

"Who?"

"The same. Must be the Devil, I suppose. I always think of him as in a box at private theatricals of human passions, grinning his head off."

"And when they've had their fun?" she persisted.

"Then they untie the knot, I suppose," he answered indif-

ferently. "But we needn't think about that yet. What I came in to remark is that it's September, and we'd better 'gather ye roses' while we may."

"Meaning?"

Why should that have irritated him?

"You know very well what I mean."

And of course she did. The question had been only to gain time—a moment more of being less sure that in a few weeks he would be going—always going. . . . But why should she care?

"Where are your roses?" she said. "There are almost none in my garden."

"Come along then," he said roughly. "Upstairs."

He pulled her to her feet, and caught her, as she looked about to fall.

"You can't mean . . . ?"

"Why not?"

"But it's morning! And you didn't come last night . . ."

"No, I worked late. And what's the matter with morning? Who used to talk to me about having to hide? We don't now—we're married."

She could only look at him piteously.

"Oh, very well then! You're not my slave. Never mind. I'll not ask you so soon again."

Would there never be a worst to it—never a worst?

He had gone back to the study and shut the door.

LII. "THERE IS NO ANSWER," SHE SAID

ON THE twenty-third of September Kingsland had a telegram. Molly brought it while they were at lunch.

"About the play," he cried, with sudden exhilaration.

He read it and laid it down: "Well, I'm dashed! It's a cable."

The words were: "Play accepted here. Writing. Goring."

"Do you know what that means? That means New York. That's worth while. Who cares whether they do it here now or not? They'll come to it in the end if it makes a hit in the States."

"It means," said Olwen carefully, "that you'll have to go over there for the rehearsal."

"Perhaps. I don't know. Not necessarily." But it was easy to see that he was playing with the idea.

"I'd better get this one finished if I can. Nothing like striking while the iron's hot."

But he had time enough for finishing. There was no word from Goring for more than a month. The new play was finished then. He had read it to her, in an expansive mood; and as she listened the dream came back. She had been able to say all that he could wish to hear, thinking herself blessed among women to have so wonderful a husband. And even while he told her she was no good at all as a critic, he had been pleased. She had been able to break through the stone wall of separation that came that terrible first of September.

Then came Goring's letter. He read it aloud at breakfast;

and as she listened she had the strange sense that all the solidity of the world was changed again into sliding screens of shadows. She remembered that it had been so when her father died.

At the end he said only: "It looks as though I should have to go."

"It does," she agreed.

"I suppose I might as well get off at once?" he asked.

"Yes." That was all she could manage.

But after a time—a long time—she had to ask—she could not let the question go unasked: "You couldn't, I suppose, take me with you?"

The silence, the heart-breaking silence. . . .

"Yes," he said slowly. "If you wish to go."

His words fell heavily.

"But . . . ?"

He did not help her.

"I'd better not," she tried again. "There's probably some good reason . . ."

Another deadly silence.

"Some reason . . ." she faltered, hoping against hope for contradiction.

"I know of none," he said, still in the same lifeless way, "none that you, or the world, would admit."

He meant her to ask more, of course; and she could not. It was easier to give way without asking.

"I won't go," she said in a trembling voice.

"Why not?" How his voice could cut! What was the matter?

She must make light of the whole situation: "All sorts of reasons. It would cost double." It occurred to her, even as she spoke, that she could pay her own way.

Perhaps he also thought of that, for he said: "We could manage that."

"Then there's the house and the garden and . . ."

"Those things could be managed. Probably you need a change."

She was silent, but her thoughts were racing like thunder rack: she must give up—and she couldn't; she must let go—and she couldn't; she must seem content—and her heart was breaking. It shouldn't be—one's heart needn't break ever—but it was . . .

"You wouldn't," he suggested long after—she had lost count of time—"care to go to Italy instead?"

She could only look a question.

"You see, you do need a change. You're tired of all this; and, although you don't know it, you're tired of me."

"You mean," she said, so low that he could scarcely hear, "that you're tired of me."

"I mean nothing of the kind!" he said sharply. "You're not fair!"

"But then, it's because I don't understand. I don't know how I shall ever understand."

He seemed to be considering; but all he said at last was, "Come into the library and let's have it out."

There he took her in his arms and kissed her forehead and hair with a kind of rough tenderness. But he would not sit down to talk quietly. He moved about, doing this and that, pushing books in and out of the shelves, straightening the rows, poking the fire, looking out of the window, aimlessly picking up and setting down trifles. It was evident that he was both embarrassed and perturbed. . . . She could not help him and she could not begin.

What he said at last was: "It's not your fault—not in any way. In the beginning it was mine for not keeping off. The rest followed."

She leaned back in her low chair, with all her being gathered into a fierce resolve—not to give way, not to allow any

sign of her misery to escape. It was a poor performance, but it was the best she could do.

He was saying: "If our marriage isn't—altogether a failure, it's because—well, give me credit for it—I've had the sense to clear out now and then."

"Is that why you're going now?"

"No. Not mainly. I'm going now because it's a chance. I shall never amount to anything. These things I've written are mere stuff. If they please the public at all, it will be only for a day. But it's a bit of a game—writing them. It's better than sheer rotting. More than that, there's a kind of sport in it, because it's not so easy—catching the public taste, I mean. Coming back from France as I did, all nerve-shotten. . . . But I didn't mean to speak of that. I'm not excusing myself. What I'm trying to explain is why I—why I was glad to get that cable. It's jolly hard to do. You see, I like to meet people: many people, strange people, silly people—all kinds. . . . I like to watch the world spinning on. . . ."

That was like something the old man had talked of; but she could not remember it for the pain in her head . . . *what* was it? What *was* it?

So suddenly that she caught her breath, he fell on his knees by her and laid his face in her lap: "O Olwen, my dear, can't you see that I love you without wanting to be with you all the time?"

She was quick with her caressing hands: "I try to. Go on."

He was up again in a moment: "Yes, but how? It's not continuous, that state of mind we call love; it's intermittent, don't you see? It has its crests and its hollows, like waves. It has to be rare or we'd die of it. Don't you see?"

"I don't know. What happens when you're not—loving me?"

Reaching for his pipe, he knocked from the mantelshelf a little china figure, which smashed on the fender. "Damn!"

She was before him in picking up the pieces. The figure was a silly Dresden shepherdess who carried matches in her apron; but she remembered how her father used to tease her about a certain likeness to herself. She had resented his teasing. Now that her small china sister was smashed, she felt as if somehow it were herself.

"It was of no value," she said, throwing the pieces into the waste-paper basket.

When he spoke again, pipe in mouth, he did not answer her question: "The only people who make what is called a success of married life, I think, are those who have never known what love means at all. If their habits of thought and living are the same, they're simply a pair of congenial friends, plus. . . ." He stopped and considered the bowl of his pipe: "It's an odd kind of hypocrisy to look upon the pleasure of sex as a duty to the world. But there you are. Nobody knows what happens in another man's house. If there are children these become the centre of interest for both; all right if it doesn't spoil the next generation. I suppose the greatest satisfaction most people have is the feeling that their own disappointments in life may somehow be made good in their children. If there are none, she mothers him; and if he doesn't object to that, it works all right. But there's mighty little in it of the feeling that drew us together. If there is at first, it's killed by inches—got to be. It can't live in—in a home. You've got to choose—the one or the other."

"Why," she asked, "did you choose wrong? Why did you marry me at all?"

He sat down, then, and smoked a while in silence: "If I tell the truth, it will hurt you."

"A little hurting, more or less, doesn't matter."

"I'm not sure that I can tell the truth, or that I should be sure I had told it."

"But try."

"They're such complex things, you see—motives. I had a general feeling of uneasiness about you. Suppose—I wasn't going to let you go through with that alone."

"No fear," she said proudly. "I took care . . ."

"You did? I didn't know that. So did I at first; but then . . . And it bothered me. I suppose I might have waited to see. But that was too much like compulsion. I'll admit you had me worried."

"No need," she said. Her mind flashed back to that dreadful Sunday—was it less than six months ago? Her fault, partly her own fault. She should not have gone. It had not been fair to go when she knew he had been drinking. . . . Yet in some moments there was an inevitability that could not be resisted. . . . That was one. . . . It had to be. . . . What was he saying now?

"You don't know. There's no security."

"And suppose I had had a child—you wouldn't have liked it," she said bitterly.

"No, I shouldn't. To me children are a lot of dirty, noisy little animals. I'm wrong, no doubt; but I'm made that way. And as for carrying on the line of the Kingslands—" He shrugged.

"I knew all that, and I took care . . ." she said. She told briefly of her journey to Bristol.

In the silence that followed she remembered some story—some old story: some woman who had made a bolt of her arm to keep out the murderers of a king. She could not remember what king. . . . But her arm was holding well; they should not come in, these murderers—not until she was alone. . . . But if she let go, let them in, let them trample her life out, there might be less pain. The old man had said . . . Yes, he said, there was only the now—the now—the now. . . .

"But you," he said at last. "You'd be happy, I think, if you had children. I've watched you with that cat."

"Let the cat suffice," she said.

"That's where we are so hopelessly apart. You're crying out for a state of life that I couldn't bear at all."

"Don't talk that way. I'm happy except . . ."

"Yes, except."

"I mean, when . . ."

"Yes, when."

"You yourself have said, many a time, happiness isn't the thing." The old man, she remembered, had said one could have it all the time; one needn't be without; it was all one's fault. . . . But the old man was wrong.

"Whatever I may have said, I don't know anything about it now, except that it is not the bread and butter of life."

She let that pass: "But you've given me only one reason—for marrying me, I mean."

"What's the good of discussing that?" He was beginning to lose patience. "The immediate occasion of it was, I suppose . . . No, that's better left unsaid."

"I can say it. You'd been drinking until you didn't know what you were about. That was why I tried to stop you. I knew you'd feel trapped and repent."

"I didn't feel trapped. And I didn't repent. But we are not going to talk about it any more." When he spoke in that tone, discussion was ended.

"No, in a moment we are going to talk about—New York. But there's something else—something I must know."

"Out with it, then."

The question shaped itself in a dozen forms, but not one of them could she utter. If he had married her as the only way to get free of her in the end, she would never know, because she could not ask. It was a question to be buried—buried so deep. . . .

"You'd better ask it," he admonished.

If he said "Yes," the word would kill the last hope, the last

little hope. If he said "No," the rift between them would only be widened by her continued mistrust, which she knew no answer could destroy, and by his knowledge of it and his sense of injury, if she were wrong . . . a tangle beyond the ravelling. Let it go. Throw it away.

"You won't?" he said, and rose to put his pipe away.

"There is no answer," she said. "When shall you sail?"

LIII. DARKNESS RUSHED AT HER

THERE was no reason why he should not sail almost at once: as soon as his passport could be arranged for, business matters settled, passage taken—the sooner, the better.

He was continually coming and going; there were so many unexpected things to be cared for. For of course he was not coming back very soon; he did not know when he was coming back—some time, of course. When the play was launched, and he had seen a bit of the country. He had always wanted to go to the States. . . .

Her chief concern was to keep him from seeing that she minded more than he thought she ought to mind; of course, she must be properly sorry, but only properly sorry, not disturbingly so.

She could not have been too successful, she feared, for he more than once suggested that she could go along if she liked.

The first time it happened was when she carried in to him some mended work, trifles of buttons and so on. He had not heard her come because he was busy taking down a big valise from the closet shelf, and whistling as he did so.

On turning with it, he positively started: "I say! You are a little ghost. How did you get here so quietly? . . . You don't look well this morning. What's the matter?"

She turned away, while he was looking for a place to put down the big bag, and frantically rubbed her cheeks pink: "I'm well. Are you going to take both bags?"

He struggled with the lock of the one he had: "Yes. You know—it isn't too late for you to come if you like."

"Why should I like?" she said gaily. "If I went along I'd not only be in the way all the time, but you'd never be coming back to me. . . ." That was as far as she could get.

"But if it's going to make you ill—staying, I mean . . ."

"It won't. Fancy being ill from such a cause!" She was afraid she had overdone it, for he did not look reassured.

"I wish you would go to Italy—or somewhere—while I'm away," he urged.

"I will, later—if I want to. I promise that."

Perhaps he did not hear the condition. He returned to his packing, but obviously not in spirits to whistle.

If one could keep from the sense of the days slipping away, could keep from counting them, from saying: "Nearly two weeks yet; a week from Monday; the day after tomorrow; tomorrow! . . ." It was like watching the clock before an execution. When the thread was cut it would be better.

And the Sunday night came. He would have to leave early in the morning.

As she lay in bed she could hear him moving about in his room, putting together last things. When she closed her eyes she could see the steamer that would carry him away, moving down the Channel. The wind was high in the garden that night; it would be wild on the Channel. . . .

It was late before he came. So many minutes wasted; but there were more. They must have them all—really have them —not waste them with foolish tears.

So she smiled and held out eager arms: "There's one thing you must tell me tonight; you must tell me what I am to you."

"Yes," he said. "But not in words."

With her head in the hollow of his shoulder and his one hand in both hers, she was able to lie very still through the slow passing of the night into dawn.

It was not thinking.

It was not happiness or unhappiness.

It was only the pulse of living.

In the dawn there were no Fates dancing in the room, ready to cut the thread of her life; there was only the occasional rattle of a branch against the window. For the wind was still high and gusty. She would have to think of the wind when the steamer went her way down the Channel. There were wrecks sometimes. . . .

With the dawn he was awake; he had to go so early. When he sat up to look at her she was ready with an eager, "Yes?"

"Do you know now what you are to me?"

"Yes." Did she know? What was the truth? This was no time for the truth.

"Shall you remember?"

"Yes."

"I shall be coming back soon, you know."

"Yes." No need to deny that. There was no reason to doubt it—none; but she knew that it was not true. After a long time, perhaps . . . perhaps. . . . One must hope.

It was almost as if he heard what was going on in her mind: "Yes, I shall be coming back before long. You'll be surprised to see me. I'll come unless—"

"Unless—?"

"Unless you write me not to."

"Why should I do that?"

"You might come to feel that—after the best of life there'd be no bearing the second-best. You might be afraid to let me come back."

She thought: "Or you to come." But she did not say it. She said only: "We shall see."

"If you need me at any time . . ."

"Yes." she said. "I'm afraid you'll miss your train."

"No haste, with all the big luggage gone. If you want me —or if you feel that you must come . . ."

"Yes," she said. What she had to learn was, not to want.

"And you'll be going to Italy yourself, before long."

"Yes," she whispered, "perhaps."

"I must get up in a moment—in a moment."

Then, presently: "There'll be a mark on your breast."

And she passionately: "Make one! make one!"

"Perhaps," he said, and: "It will work out all right. You'll see."

He looked at his watch: "By Jove!"

After that there was no time for anything. There was Molly to be hurried with the breakfast, the last packing, the cab waiting. . . .

He was struggling into his coat, she fumbling to help him. The world began to change again into the sliding screens of shadows. She could hardly see him; but he seemed to have his hat—and the door was open.

He turned again, and there was nothing but his arms and his kiss.

"Not so long," he said.

Through a kind of darkness she saw him plunging down the steps. . . .

Then she was leaning against the shut door.

Was she going to faint? She had never fainted in her life.

"Molly," she tried to call. The darkness rushed at her.

LIV. GROWING

"WHAT day of the month is it?" she asked when Molly had brought in the letters. She had been standing at the window, watching the postman's zigzag way down the street. He would pass the door, of course; but still somehow, one watched. No, he was coming up. Not the time for bills; probably a request for a subscription. Yes, they flourished in January. It would be that.

"What day did you say it is?" She had been turning over the envelopes, and had not heard Molly's reply.

It was a good idea not to be disappointed. For, as usual, there was nothing. But that was no matter when one was not disappointed. It had been much worse when one watched the mails, and read the papers to see when the steamers were due and when they were late—much worse.

There was nothing but three envelopes with something inside: to be opened, glanced at, and thrown into the fire. That was all until the afternoon post. Then the whole business over again.

It was not that one expected anything, only that in such a little town one depended so much on the post. . . .

Uncle Simon with the flu—oh, dear, perhaps she ought to go up? A sales catalogue; to be sure, it was January. Some advertisement—no, cuttings from newspapers. New York. And she had thought there was nothing.

So the play was on; and they liked it. That was not surprising. No, some of them had no sense. But on the whole,

take the reviews all together—it was a beginning. He must be satisfied and pleased. He had sent the cuttings. He wanted her to be satisfied and pleased too.

Well, of course, one was. . . . Where was Pillicock?

The first night—the thrill of the first night! Had he been there? He would write as soon as he could and tell all about it. She might even have a letter by the next boat; or perhaps by this. Sometimes not all the mail arrived at the same time. There might be a letter in a day or two. . . .

She put her hands to her breast with a sudden feeling that something had broken there: she must get away—go somewhere. . . .

"Of course, I can go at any time," she told herself. "I've only to say so. . . . Or I could go to Italy. Yes, I'll go to Italy."

But she could not go that day, to be sure; and the day passed like its fellows. She watched for the postman on his afternoon rounds; but he did not stop. He would not, she knew that. She had known all along that there would be no more mail until another steamer came in. It was only that there was always a chance. But she was not disappointed. Not a bit.

"I think I'll . . ." What could one do? "I'll go walk in the woods for a bit."

She went upstairs very quietly. If Molly knew what she meant to do, she might argue. Molly was taking rather a high hand, these days, when there was any question of health. And the woods would be wet.

The Roman road was a slough, with a trickle of water here and there. One must climb carefully; no need of spraining an ankle or twisting a ligament again. One must go slowly.

There was the sun. Cloud-hidden all the day, and now coming out with the cheerfulness of July.

July? It was July when she had gone to Torquay, when

that queer old man . . . He was a wise old man. He had said so much that one remembered—that one had tried to carry out, in fact; only one couldn't quite. . . . As he said, one had to live into it. That was the way. Nothing but the years would do it.

So into the woods. Oh, the swords of yellow light glinting between the trees, the green trunks of the trees—long swords of yellow light! The sun would be setting in a few moments; but she had the glory of it still. Yes, the moment; the one moment at a time that would make of life a different thing, if one could . . . some day. . . .

The oaks knee-deep in bracken, and between them the ranks of the gorse and the turf-overgrown road—the Roman road, that led to the far blue hills. That was enough to live by—for the moment.

A steep way up and down, over hills and through valleys. The Romans were never turned from a thing they undertook. That was why they had succeeded. It was the way to succeed: to have a purpose and to—hang on to it by the teeth, as it were; to die rather than give it up. That was the way; only, when one got it, one found out that it was not worth all the trouble of the getting. Surely that was the way with the Roman Empire. The life-blood that had gone into its making, and now. . . . Look at the broken stones of its road —nothing more. . . .

The sun was still piercing the glades, turning the purplish bracken of the hollows to a sand-colour. In this hollow the frost still held its own: it would be a sharp night again. The water no longer trickled down the old road; it was ice. She stooped and took some pieces up, holding them against the light. Pigeon-feathers—this one; in the long rut it had shaped itself, or some one had shaped it, into the likeness of a pigeon's wing—a lovely, lovely pattern, and lovely for stirring memory of the flight of lovely birds. A wheel this, not so unlike the

wheels of the grains of sand. It had shaped itself, or some one had shaped it, into the likeness of a wheel—like cut crystal, but melting into water that dripped between the fingers as it was held. So lovely and so evanescent. . . .

But she wanted to get through the oaks to the tall beeches before the sun was gone. Looking backward, she had a shoulder of the Forest behind her—a misty darkness full of shadowy upward lines of tree-trunks—and over against the sky, where the trees thinned, shafts of diamond light, like peepholes. Darkness and shadows everywhere, but beyond them innumerable small slits of light. It might be taken as a parable of life. But she was going to the beeches. She wanted the beeches.

Yet she could not hurry past the small things underfoot. She had grown so into the habit, these last months, of looking for the small things underfoot. There were the trails of the busy frost: the most delicate outlining and veining of the dead leaves, the fringing of the green moss—the deep green moss. . . .

It was the kind of moss—on that night of midsummer madness—in some other life. Oh, in some other life. . . . And now the deep-green moss was fringed, stalk and tendril, with flowers of ice. . . .

But she must be getting on to the great beeches.

Onward she went, up and down the hillocks and gullies of the Roman road, and the level rays of the yellow sun played in and out among the tree-trunks. . . .

A great holly still heavy with red berries, and among its branches a soft cheeping. Finches, were they?

Little things must be growing under shelter: small ferns uncurling; primroses pushing up through the mould, primroses that she never saw without thinking of Pillicock—so soft, so sweet, so indifferent to all the troubles of the world. . . . No, there were no primroses yet.

Between the thinning tree-trunks before her a faint pink mist, a strange purplish-pink mist, a light unearthly. . . .

She suddenly remembered that she had never been up here before in the winter. All her life she had lived in the Forest, and this road was unknown to her in winter. They had always said it was too wild, dangerous for the covered ruts, slippery with frost. . . . She had lived almost thirty years of her life without seeing that strange loveliness between the tree-trunks, and she did not know what it was.

And while she still wondered she came to the first of the tall beeches that stood in ranks on the hill slope. The lowest of them had their spreading tops not so far above her head, and those whose mossy roots clamped the earth on the level where she stood raised their heads high in heaven above. Then first she saw the purplish-pink haze resolve itself into a wilderness of young larches covering the opposite hillside with clouds of colour, through the etched lines of the beeches.

She stood there, and suddenly stretched out her arms and drew a long breath. The world was so infinitely varied and lovely, and only a short lifetime in which to take it. . . .

But perhaps there was more. He had said there was more —that old man; he had said there was everything, and that one had it now—now in the glory of the yellow lances of the sun between the innumerable green trunks of the Forest, now with the clouds of young larches, now as she stood among the mossy roots of the far-spreading beeches that had grown there so quietly for hundreds of years; and others their forefathers for hundreds of years; back to the days of the Romans, beyond the days of the Romans—before the ancient peoples whom the Romans had fought—her people; beyond them, back into the silence of which no man knew. . . . And onward—to what? The beeches did not trouble.

In the Forest there was no sound, not even a bird, or a leaf: a primeval stillness. So it was before men troubled the world.

Yes, men troubled the world. They made it ugly. In a moment when she came to the turn she would see the ugly blackness of a pit where men with devils' faces were digging out the coal so that civilization might go on; for civilization, she had read somewhere, was built upon coal. Later, when she came to the homeward turn, the trees would be far apart, and between their branches she would see the huge dump: refuse of a great colliery in which men with black faces were digging black coal all their lives that civilization might go on.

And civilization meant . . . What did it mean? Cities, theatres, plays. . . . Oh, well, this was no time to be thinking about plays. This was the time . . .

She dropped suddenly on her knees in a bank of the long moss between two great roots of the tallest beech.

This was the time. . . . Was that the meaning of it? Would there be—would there, after all, be another Anthony Kingsland for whom the old house could be restored, in whom the old life should go on?

She knelt there very still, as if moving might kill the almost imperceptible budding of hope in her heart.

In the stillness she came to believe that it would be so.

Kneeling there under the high beech, she had a strange feeling as of wings unfolding within her, wings that would one day spread and carry her to the far spaces. If she were to have a child—his child—that would pay for all.

She crept closer in the arms of the beech and laid her cheek against its smooth body. Through half-closed eyes she could look away down the ravine with its tangle of interlaced twigs, and across at the rosy cloud of the young larches, and beyond to the blue hills, so dim that they faded into the blue of the sky. The sun must be setting now behind the forest, for all the eastern world was full of light. And in that light she dreamed. She saw the old house, with its ugliness scraped away, its ruin restored, its garden ordered with beauty:

aconites that come up through the snow like babies' heads above their green capes; the heraldry of tulips; the wilderness of columbines and noisy Canterbury bells; roses climbing in at all the windows; hedges of dahlias and chrysanthemums; timid Christmas roses, creeping under the snow—she saw them all. And she saw the old house warm and furnished with lamps and laughter and children's voices.

For he would come back. He would go away now. He would always go away; but he would come back. There would be more children. . . .

The world had turned grey, and mist was rising in the valley. She would have to run home through the twilight wood.

She did not want to leave the mother beech whose arms held her so firmly, so gently, the bit of moss against her cheek like the down on a baby's head. . . .

Yet when she went something had happened to her. Was it the touch of the tree? Was it the touch of hope? She cast off her trouble—it had become the mere sheath of a living growth—no more.

He would come back. But if he did not . . .

She would have her child. But if she did not . . .

Well.

She was living . . . she was safe—safe as the tree . . . changeless as the forest . . . part of it all . . . imperishable. . . .

Growing . . . growing. . . .